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Biden, Modi, Work To Counterbalance China



Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud and President Joe Biden shake hands next to Narendra Modi during the G20 Summit.

NEW DELHI, (IANS) - An India-Middle East-Europe economic corridor including shipping and railway links will be launched soon. The first-of-its-kind economic corridor will be a historic initiative on cooperation, connectivity, and infrastructure involving India, UAE, Saudi Arabia, EU, France, Italy, Germany, and the US.

The absence of Chinese leader Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin provided opportunities for President Joe Biden to make a more affirmative case at the summit. His backing of the new plans to partner with Europe,

Contd. on P32

Corruption: Harry Sidhu Faces Jail



Former Anaheim Mayor Harry Sidhu.

India-West News Desk

ANAHEIM, CA - Former Anaheim Mayor Harry Sidhu is set to plead guilty after being implicated in a federal investigation involving false statements to investigators about his involvement in a

land sale deal with Angel Stadium. Once Sidhu enters his guilty pleas, he will face a statutory maximum sentence of 10 years in federal prison for the obstruction of justice count, up to 20 years in federal prison for the wire fraud count, and up to five years in federal prison for each false statements count.

The charges revolve around allegations that Sidhu sought campaign support of up to \$1 million from the baseball club

Contd. on P19

I Don't Have Anything To Do With Politicians: Vivek Agnihotri



Vivek Agnihotri with wife Pallavi Joshi.

By NIMMI RAGHUNATHAN

Right off the bat, this interview seemed to be set up for slingshots: For the critics, the questions are geared to give him a pass, for the die-hard of the nationalist variety, they are aimed at getting him. Whatever the case, Vivek Agnihotri, 49, cannot be ignored. As if to prove the point, the day after the interview, his feature film, 'The Kashmir Files,' figured in the National Awards for Best Feature Film on National Integration.

Pallavi Joshi, 54, his wife and the producer of several of his films, including the new one gearing up for release in September 'The Vaccine War' was named the Best Supporting Actress for 'The Kashmir Files,' her second National Award.

Contd. on P34

What's In A Name? Meluha, Bharat, India...



NEW DELHI (IANS) - When President Droupadi Murmu sent out invites for the dinner hosted by her at the G20 Summit, she described herself as the 'President of Bharat' and set off a heated discussion that may have abated temporarily but is headed for a vociferous revival.

Even Prime Minister Narendra Modi chose 'Bharat' as his country's name at the G20 Summit. Rumors, predictably, are rife that the 'Republic of India' and 'We the People of India' are heading for a name change, but it may help to be reminded that India has had many names over the centuries of its existence.

Every name India has ever had historically had a specific connotation and

Contd. on P30



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Attorney Salil Dudani's Lawsuit Prompts Historic Zero Bail Policy In L.A

By REENA RATHORE

LOS ANGELES, CA – Calling the policy of cash bail a “clear, pervasive, and serious constitutional violation,” a Los Angeles Superior Court judge has issued a preliminary injunction to ensure that people accused of low-level, non-violent offenses are no longer detained while awaiting arraignment simply because they cannot afford bail.

When law enforcement officials arrest someone, they set charges which come with a specific bail amount as listed on the county's bail schedules. Those who can pay the money upfront are able to secure their freedom while others wait for their turn in a jail cell.

Under this new ruling, the Los Angeles Police Department and L.A. County Sheriff's Department cannot require cash bail for people arrested for certain crimes prior to their arraignment. Repeat offenders while out on no bail may be made subject to a cash payment.

The injunction, which went into effect May 24, reinstates the zero-bail policy in effect during the pandemic to minimize overcrowding in jails. Hearings are currently being held to figure out the next steps for the injunction.

The case that prompted this decision is a class action lawsuit representing six people who were held in custody for days because

of their inability to make bail. The lawsuit argued that arrestees with “sufficient wealth” (or whose family and friends can acquire the funds) to post the scheduled bail amount promptly go free. They called this “wealth-based” detention “unconstitutional.”

Salil Dudani, one of the attorneys in the lawsuit, called it a positive step towards reforming the criminal justice system.

“Cash bail, which is literally the price of freedom, is senseless, cruel, arbitrary, and indefensible. It's a clear violation of constitutional rights and it's causing so much harm in the public interest that the court ordered an injunction. That's an obvious and overdue first step...,” Dudani told India-West. “It has profoundly devastating consequences on the individual who is arrested, on their family, and ultimately on their community. People lose their jobs because they can't show up to work, and people are cut-off from their medications, physical and mental health care. Often people can even lose the custody of their children because they are in jail and can't care for them only because they don't have enough access to cash.”

Dudani, an attorney at Civil Rights Corps, litigates money bail and other abuses in the criminal justice system. He went on to explain that between their arrest and



Salil Dudani.

their first hearing in court, which is about 2-5 days in L.A., the person arrested has not been formally charged with any crime.

He said the purpose of bail was to encourage people's appearance at all court dates and protect public safety but “using cash bail schedule like L.A.'s and like most places in California, is contrary to that cause and that's the academic consensus.”

Commenting on the efficacy of money bail, Dudani said there is no evidence to support the idea that a person needs a monetary incentive to show up at court. In, fact, he stated, it makes people less likely to show up in court, and it makes them more likely to commit crimes in the future because their lives are destabilized.

“And that's why we brought this case. It's not only unfair but it's contrary to public safety. It in-

creases crime rate; even a few days in jail destabilizes people's lives so fundamentally,” he said.

Out of the six named plaintiffs in this case, one was never charged with any crime at all, Dudani pointed out. “They were in jail for five full days and the moment a judge and lawyer looked at the case, they said you are safe to release,” he said. “...It's wasteful and unnecessary in addition to being unfair and contrary to public safety.”

“Most people are perfectly safe to release and in fact, that's what places like L.A. do but for those who can afford to pay,” he remarked. “For the small minority who aren't released, they are promptly brought before a judge and they are given due process: they are given a lawyer, a hearing and then the least restrictive conditions on their release are imposed. That's very far from how the L.A. system works. For that period, people don't have lawyers, there are no hearings, and they are just sitting in jail solely because they can't pay. That doesn't make sense.”

Dudani knows what wrongful detention can do to you from first-hand experience. When he was in college and interning at the D.C. Public Defender Service, he was detained on suspicion of terrorist activity by the D.C. police. “It only reinforced what I saw happening to our clients day after day,” Dudani,

who later recounted his experience in a TED Talk, told India-West. “That is part of what set me on this path. That was a very eye-opening experience for me seeing the extent of racial injustice and the overall cruelty in the criminal system.”

The young activist, a graduate of Yale Law School, underscored the effectiveness of alternative measures such as electronic court date reminders, mental health services, transportation, and childcare assistance for people.

“Court reminders literally just text message reminders...Sounds so simple but it makes sense, right? Like every time I have a dentist appointment, I get a text message that helps me remember so why appearances shouldn't be like that,” he asked. “In New York City, when they rolled out court reminders, it increased court appearances by 26 percent.”

Citing studies, Dudani reiterated that “there is rigorous research that asked the question: ‘Does money bail do anything at all to protect public safety?’ And the answer is no.”

Dudani opined that the way to achieve public safety is not by “carceral control.” “It is by investing in things that actually make us safe like housing and health care... There is a lot of misinformation and a lot of very misleading and selective use of statistics when it comes to bail reform and L.A. is no exception,” he said.

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COMMENTARY

US Visa Backlog Badly Impacting Indian Nationals

By **Mishita Jethi**
Special to India-West

NEW YORK, NY - Every month, the Department of State (DOS) comes out with a visa bulletin. The dates in the visa bulletin show which green card applications can move to the final stage. The August 2023 and September 2023 Visa Bulletins have once again highlighted the persisting visa backlog issue that continues to affect India-born nationals living in the United States on temporary visas.

These bulletins saw a significant retrogression in these dates. Among others, the growing backlog of visa cases has pushed back the Final Action Dates (FAD) of many categories. The worst-hit category for India-born nationals was the Employment Based First Preference (EB-1) category, which retrogressed to January 1, 2012. This means that those India-born nationals who wish to file for their adjustment of status (AOS) or apply for their green card application at a U.S. consulate abroad will only be able to do so if their priority date is on or before January 1, 2012.

Consider for a moment what the world looked like in January 2012. Barack Obama was still in his first term as President; Hurricane Sandy was yet to devastate the East Coast of the United States; Queen Elizabeth II was yet to celebrate her Diamond Jubilee; the Curiosity rover was yet to land on Mars; Instagram was not yet available for Android users. It should behoove us to think that there are some India-born nationals who have been living in the United States since January 2012 and have not yet been able to apply for and receive their permanent residence status in the United States due to the heavy visa backlog.

This visa backlog results from the overwhelming demand for employment-based green cards. The annual limit for employment-based visas is set by Congress and has remained unchanged since the 1960s and 1970s. However, due to the changing economic and technological landscapes, the demand from certain countries like India and China has exceeded the limit for many years. This has led to a backlog of foreign

nationals who are waiting for their visas to be processed. This protracted uncertainty also takes a toll on individuals' career aspirations, family plans, and life choices.

This heavy backlog for India-born nationals in EB-1 category indicates that even individuals deemed as having "extraordinary ability" or those who are "outstanding researchers" or "multinational managers and executives" may also have to wait for several years to get permanent residence status. In many cases, spouses of these visa holders are unable to work due to lack of work authorization for dependent visa holders. This retrogression impacts plans including decisions regarding employment, education and in many cases buying homes and other



assets, until their priority dates become current again. Imagine postponing major life decisions on the basis of vague and intangible factors such as "available visa numbers" and "priority dates". For those living under constant stress of nonimmigrant status renewals, visa stamping, and aging-out children, the smallest change in visa backlog could mean the difference between finally realizing the American Dream of a home with a white-picket fence and packing up one's belongings after decades of living in the United States and re-starting life elsewhere.

The visa backlog also directly harms American businesses. Industries like technology and healthcare that rely heavily on high-skilled immigrants, particularly those from India and China, are hampered by this backlog. Delayed access to skilled workers can hinder innovation and competitiveness, potentially pushing companies to establish operations elsewhere. Countries like Canada and Australia are already streamlining their immigration systems to attract highly skilled individuals from other countries. Should that trend continue, the United States may lose its status as the destination of choice for these highly skilled individuals in the coming years.

It is not yet all doom-and-gloom though, since the DOS has mentioned in the August 2023 Visa Bulletin that it expects the FAD to advance in the October 2023 Visa Bulletin – at least until the dates announced in the July 2023 Visa Bulletin. However, DOS has

cautioned that this advancement will depend completely on the demand for EB-1 visas by India-born applicants and the FY 2024 annual limit for employment-based visas. In other words, while we do expect to see some movement in the EB-1 category by October 2023, if the category continues to remain as oversubscribed as it is now (either because of applicants having multiple approved petitions in every category or because the demand from other countries continues to remain as strong as it is now), the advancement may not be too significant.

In conclusion, the significant EB-1 retrogression in the August 2023 and September 2023 Visa Bulletin stands as a reminder that urgent reform is needed to address this deeply concerning issue that continues to plague the highly skilled workers born in India – who but for their country would not have been stuck in this seemingly unending backlog of visa numbers. Sustainable changes in the immigration policy of the United States are needed to ensure that the country can continue to attract and retain the world's brightest minds and maintain its position as a global leader in innovation and progress. Failure to do so will result in a significant loss, not just for Indian nationals but for the United States as a whole.

(Jethi, based in New York, is a partner in the Chugh Firm)

OPINION

All Talk Of US Decline Is Unproven, Grossly Exaggerated

By **YASHWANT RAJ**

"As world and Asian leaders gather this month in ... for the G20, in ... for APEC meetings, and in ... for the East Asia Summit, a phenomenon coloring some observers' perceptions of global politics and economics is the alleged decline of the US." This passage about "alleged American decline" is from a commentary that ran on the website of Brookings, a major US think tank, in 2011 under the headline "Is America Declining?"

Is the US declining under President Biden?

The US dollar remains the dominant international currency of trade and exchange on Biden's watch with no serious threat despite the wishful rhetoric from China and Russia; the economy continues to be the largest in the world with \$26.65 trillion GDP (China is second at \$19.27), according to the International Monetary Fund; US-led NATO has grown, acquir-

ing a new member, Finland, with another one waiting in the wings, Sweden; US-led an alliance of western countries has foiled Putin's takeover of Ukraine; Biden's America has rapidly escalated the Quad's engagement to summit-level and founded AUKUS to counter rising Chinese influence in the Indo-Pacific; and, finally, Biden pulled the US out of Afghanistan, ending its longest war after the previous two presidents, Barack Obama and Donald Trump, had failed.

Biden has also focused his administration on countering China's rising global influence as a competitor. Instead of launching a messy trade war like his predecessor - Trump, he has used narrowly focused authorities to choke China, denying it sensitive technology under the overall strategy of de-risking and diversifying.

He has scaled up pressure on China, whose economy is undergoing its worst downturn yet, to concede more market access and fair and equal treatment of US companies. His commerce secretary, Gina Raimondo, read the riot act to the Chinese leadership during a recent visit telling them their country is becoming "uninvestable".

Biden's own personal image was seen largely positively globally, as demonstrated in a poll by Pew earlier in the year.

A median of 54 percent of the respondents in 23 countries said they have confidence in the American president. In the same poll, a median of 58 percent of the respondents said they had a positive view of the US; although many of them also said the US interferes in the affairs of other countries.

A Pew poll in 2020, which was Trump's presidency, reported an all-time low in the world's perception of the US — a median of only 34 percent of the respondents held a favorable view of the US, and the incumbent president at the time was down to 16 percent favorability.

Biden himself and the Biden-led American fare considerably better, with double-digit leads in percentage points.

President Biden scores low popularity ratings at home in the US, however.

The narrative of American decline draws some sustenance from how Americans themselves view America's global standing.

And it had to do with the domestic politics of the US.

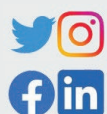
"Much of this recent change in attitudes has come from Republicans and Republican-leaning independents. Four years ago, 40 percent of Republicans said the US stands above all other nations, compared with 31 percent today. And the share of Republicans saying other countries are better has nearly doubled, from 9 percent to 17 percent," Pew said in an August report.

Allegations of American decline remain what they were in 2011, allegations.

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Quad: Importance Of Regional Approaches Highlighted At SoCal Event

India-West Staff Reporter

CERRITOS, CA – At the behest of the World Affairs Council of Orange County and with the support of Southern California-based consultant Gunjan Bagla, a distinguished panel on September 6 discussed the role of India in the Quad grouping.

Featuring incoming the new Indian Consul General at San Francisco Dr. Srikar Reddy, Australia's CG Jane Duke, Japan's Kenko Sone, and Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Pacific and East Asian Affairs, Camille P Dawson, the panelists, moderated by Bagla, broached security, economic and diplomatic issues.

Consul General Kenko Sone kicked off the conversation at the Sheraton Hotel here, explaining that shortly after the Indian Ocean tsunami and in December 2004, the then Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe had announced support for a free and open Indo-Pacific with collaboration among these four free-market democracies, "Summit meetings followed, with much collaboration among the 4 countries. Not just at the vision level but at the ground level."

Jane Duke of Australia explained that at the recent summit, the pillars emphasized were economic partner-



The panelists discussed a series of world issues affecting the region.



An engaged and engrossed audience attended the Cerritos event.

ship, rule of law, institutions, and transparency and that there had been a shared interest in the health and infrastructure sectors.

Secretary Dawson highlighted how no one country could do this alone and that all four countries would benefit from a regional

approach. She said that the U.S. wants to build a "lattice of partnerships" through established multilateral organizations, but also via mini-laterals such as the Quad.

Consul General Reddy said India's interests in the grouping centered around economic issues such

as a growth opportunity for mitigating climate change, cooperation between shipping ports - including Los Angeles and Mumbai - EV batteries, semiconductors, maritime piracy prevention, and marine resources collaboration.

Last August, LA hosted the Indo-Pacific Economic Forum, sometimes called the Quad Plus in which Reddy had participated as part of India's Ministry of Commerce. Asked why India was the only country that did not support the Trade pillar of the Forum, he said that the forum did not offer any trade concessions or advantages to India.

The event had promised to bring out the relevance of the Quad to the residents of Southern California. With Japan being the largest foreign investor in the region, Sone cited recent examples

of collaboration between the ports of Nagoya and Los Angeles, developing the hydrogen supply chain for a green economy, and Japan's role in the semiconductor supply chain. Dawson pointed to the large diasporas of the quad countries in the region, the presence of foreign

students from India and other countries, and the massive trade between the region and quad countries.

Asked about relations between China and Quad, Dawson answered crisply: Secretary of State Tony Blinken had spelled out two policies, one for China (invest, align with partners, compete responsibly) and another for the Indo-Pacific region, and that the latter one was also to promote rules of international trade in the region and cooperation.

Encouraged to say more, the panelist added that with China came many more opportunities, that we could encourage China to do the right thing, that communication is always important, and that rules of international trade often benefit all including China and its people.

Moderator Bagla pointed out a few of the attendees in the room including Marisela Caraballo DiRuggiero of the Port of Los Angeles, Christine Peterson from LA Mayor Karen Bass' office, and several leaders of the American Jewish Committee. World Affairs Council Chair Bill Edwards and President Richard Downie attended as did the Executive Director of the Asia Society of Southern California, Anjali Sharan.

Photos: Alissa Bernstein

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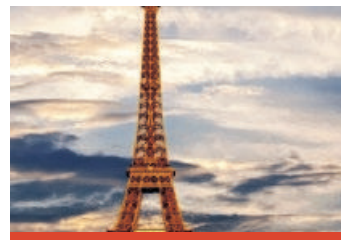
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Bhupesh & Kumud Parikh Breast Diagnostic Center Opens In Glendale



The Parikh family, personally affected by cancer have made generous donations toward mitigating the disease.

India-West Staff Reporter

GLENDAL, CA - Bhupesh and Kumud Parikh, esteemed residents of this city since 1969, participated in the unveiling and dedication ceremony of the newly refurbished breast diagnostic center at Adventist Health Glendale Medical Center. This cutting-edge facility, now known as the Bhupesh and Kumud Parikh Breast Diagnostic Center, marks a significant step forward in enhancing breast health diagnostics within the community.

The Parikhs’ contribution to the naming of the center is driven by both personal and altruistic motives. With one of their own children triumphing over breast cancer, their decision to support this cause aligns seamlessly with their fundamental values of benevolence in both healthcare and education.

The upgraded facility, which officially reopened its doors on August 15, symbolizes a leap forward in breast health diagnostics and reaffirms Adventist Health Glendale’s position as a faith-based, tertiary care regional hospital at the forefront of medical excellence.

Reflecting on their philanthropic journey, Bhupesh Parikh shared, “Our upbringing in India instilled in us the belief that we are stewards of our resources during our lifetime. The love and contentment derived from giving back have enriched our lives immeasurably. Having prospered through education in the U.S., we consider it our duty to empower education first. Our daughter’s battle with breast cancer reinforced our commitment to supporting breast disease defense and treatment.”

The Parikhs’ dedication to community welfare extends beyond this contribution, reflecting their longstanding history of charitable endeavors. In the early 2000s, their substantial contribution led to the establishment of the Bhupesh Parikh Health Science Building and the Kumud Parikh Nursing College at Glendale Community College. Their generosity also extends to scholarship initiatives at Cerritos Community College, Utah State University in Logan, and targeted donations in Gujarat.



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COMMUNITY

Hanuman Temple In Torrance Hosts Large I-Day Event

India-West Staff Reporter

TORRANCE, CA - On the evening of August 19, the Levy Adult Center in Torrance transformed into a vibrant tapestry of colors and cultures as the Sri Panchamukha Hanuman Temple played host to the 77th India Independence Day Celebrations. The “Jai Ho” event, a testament to the power of unity and diversity, brought together more than 1,500 people for a truly unforgettable evening of festivities.

A massive stage adorned with a “Jai Ho” banner, symbolizing “Embracing Diversity,” served as the heart of the event. Surrounding it were over 30 vendor booths representing local businesses, offering everything from delectable cuisine to jewelry, financial planning services, real estate options, insurance services, and much more. The booths were bustling with visitors throughout the event.

The event was visited by Torrance City Mayor George Chen, Council Members Asam Sheikh and John Kaji, and Torrance

Area Chamber of Commerce President Donna Dupperron.

Nearly 300 Participants showcased their talents through a variety of cultural performances. From traditional dances to songs to Yoga to speeches, the audience was treated to a dazzling display of India’s artistic heritage.

One of the standout moments of the evening was the Parade of States, a unique procession featuring representatives from a dozen Indian states. The parade was a visual spectacle, starting with an American flag carried by local Boy Scouts, followed by the Indian flag and young boys dressed as Indian soldiers. The procession continued with children dressed as Indian national leaders and heroes, each state displaying the highlights of its culture.

It culminated in a resounding performance



of “Jai Ho” by local children and an inspiring Color Guard Presentation by the West High School team. The highlight was when participants assembled to form a 6-foot American map, which they flipped to reveal the Indian map, leaving the audience in awe.

The event showcased a touching moment of unity with the exchange and hosting of both the American and Indian flags, followed by the singing of both national anthems.

The President of the temple, Kavitha Venkatraman, extended a warm welcome to the dignitaries and emphasized the temple’s role in uniting people from all parts of India and the world. The founder of the Sri Panchamukha Hanuman Temple, Narasimha Acharya highlighted the temple’s contributions to the community since its establishment in 2014 and appealed for support in finding a permanent place for the temple.

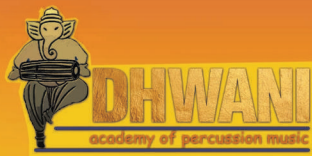


10,000 MEALS PACKAGING AND DONATIONS

Santa Fe Spring CA, Dr. Manorama Gupta president of Global Peace Foundation, Inc. and UNA-USA Long Beach chapter and committee members are thrilled to announce the successful completion of a monumental initiative aimed at combating hunger and food insecurity in children worldwide. The event was 10,000 meal packaging and donations to send to needy children worldwide. It was a vegetarian balanced nutritious food that will be transported by our partner Rise Against Hunger to all over the world including India. The initiative brought together volunteers, and donors, in a collective mission to make a meaningful impact on the lives of hungry children. 40 people including children participated in the event. The children loved packaging the food.

I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to all the volunteers, donors, and partners who contributed to the success of this initiative. Your unwavering support and dedication have made a significant difference in the lives of many children.





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San Fernando Valley Community Enjoys Vibrant I-Day Fair

India-West Staff Reporter

CHATSWORTH, CA - Thousands of people, on August 26, flocked to the grounds of Chatsworth Charter High School here in the San Fernando Valley to celebrate India's 76th Independence Day, organized by the India Association of Los Angeles (IALA).

The event was attended by the new Consul General of India Dr. K. Srikar Reddy, Congressman Brad Sherman (D-CA), City Councilman





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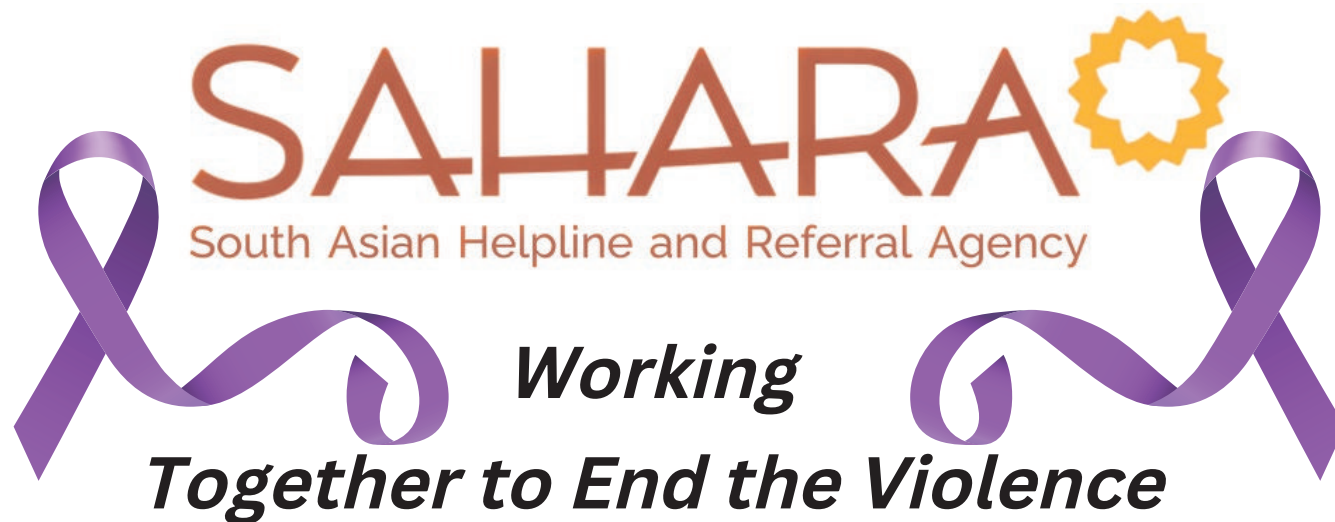
John Lee, LAUSD Board member Scott Schmerelson, representative of Attorney General Rob Bonta, and many community leaders.

IALA Chairman Manjeet Wahi welcomed and President, Manmohan Chopra lauded the progress and culture of India saying, "From giving the world the best of CEOs to giving the world Yoga, Ayurveda, and much more, India's contribution has been tremendous."

Congressman Sherman talked about the importance of India and US partnership and congratulated the audience on the success of Chandrayaan-3. Consul General Reddy praised the community and highlighted their contribution in strengthening Indo-US ties. While IALA Board members Raman Chadha and Sunil Agrawal named and recognized supporters of the event, the CG handed over plaques to those community members and sponsors.

The event showcased a cultural performance led by VP Cultural Falguni Zala and her team, featuring Indian songs, dance, and various forms of Indian arts presented by individuals of different age groups and talented artists. The audience was captivated by performances including Kathak dances, Bharatanatyam, Folk dances, Bhangra, and numerous Bollywood numbers by various groups. Various schools and dance groups, such as Kathak Kala Academy, Monika Sarin's Dance School, and Bollywood Beyond Dancing, also presented their vibrant performances.

There were 60 booths with a variety of services and products including fashion and food that attracted thousands of visitors who shopped, dined, and enjoyed the fair. A highlight was the free health and wellness information booths led by VP Health Dr. Bama Sridhar and supported by many doctors and volunteers, which were sought after by numerous Valley residents who came to assess their health parameters and receive dietary and nutritional guidance. This year IALA's magazine ran a cover story dedicated to Chandrayaan-3, depicting India as a space superpower in the making.



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UIASC Celebrate Independence Day In Buena Park

India-West Staff Reporter

BUENA PARK, CA - The United Indian Associations of Southern California (UIASC) celebrated the 77th Independence Day of India on August 19 at the Jain Center, here with the theme, 'Indian cultural intelligence vs. artificial intelligence.'

The ceremony was attended by more than 750 people. The lamp lighting to inaugurate the event was done by the Mayor of Buena Park, Arthur Brown who said, "I welcome this organization to the city, I have been coming to the Jain Center for 20 years and I am very thankful to



the Indian community to promote cultural diversity in the city, appreciate the positive work that the

Indian Diaspora has been doing." Sudip Gorakshakar provided an overview of Indian growth and

progress in the last 77 years in various sectors, followed by the presentation by

the youth of their vision of India after 25 years including a question and answer session by Jasmine Sivakumaran and Sujash Mukherjee.

The cultural event was presented by Ashi Naren from Dance Dewane which included a classical dance with the transition to Artificial Intelligence which was the theme of this year's celebration. Savithri Arts Academy, Diwdi dance group, Ranga Shree Dance Academy, and a number by Vinaini Jayasinghe with various dance forms including classical

and folk made presentations.

The event included live instrumental classical music by musicians from India including Pusthakam Ramaa (vocal), P Janardhana Rao (Mridangam), KS Jayaram (Flute), MS Manjunathan (Rhythm pad). The program also featured local artists and renditions of patriotic songs. Conveners for the event were Kewal Kanda, Sukrit Mukherjee, Vasu Pawar, Rajeshwari Kulkarni, Dr. Manorama Gupta, and Amrit Bhandari.



Photos: Radhika Patel

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A Part Of CA Highway Named After Cop Ronil Singh

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (IANS) - A stretch of a highway in California has been named after a 33-year-old police officer who was shot dead while conducting a traffic stop in 2018.

Dedicated to Ronil Singh from Newman Police Department, the "Corporal Ronil Singh Memorial Highway", which stands at Highway 33 and Stuhler Road, was unveiled at a ceremony on Sept. 2.

"Love you papa," Singh's son Arnav, who was just five months old when his father was killed, wrote on the back of the signboard.

He was present along with his mother Anamika and other family members and was joined by Singh's Newman Police Department col-

leagues and officials, including county Supervisor Channce Condit, state Senator Marie Alvarado-Gil, US Representative John Duarte, and Assemblyman Juan Alanis.

"Today, a promise that was made has finally been brought to life. The Newman community honored the late Corporal Singh for his dedication and commitment to putting his life on the line for the safety of others," Senator Alvarado-Gil wrote in a Facebook post, saying that Singh will always be a hero.

A resolution for naming a portion of Highway 33 after Singh was passed by the Assembly Transportation Committee in September 2019.

Fiji-born Singh started his law



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enforcement career as a volunteer with the Modesto Police Department and then served as a cadet and animal service officer with the Turlock Police Department.

He was gunned down by a suspected drunk driver when he was working overtime on Christmas night on December 26, 2018.

Multiple agencies responded to assist Singh, who was found at the scene with gunshot wounds. He was transported to a local hospital where he was pronounced dead.

In 2020, Mexican national Paulo Virgen Mendoza, also known as Gustavo Perez Arriaga, pleaded guilty to murdering Singh and was sentenced to life in prison without parole.

He was apprehended at a relative's residence in Kern County following an intensive three-day manhunt. Paulo's brother, Conrado Virgen Mendoza, was sentenced in 2021 to 21 months in prison for conspiring with others to assist his brother in fleeing to Mexico to avoid prosecution for Singh's murder.

Teen's 'Trillion Angels' Spreading Hope

India-West Staff Reporter

MILPITAS, CA - It all began during Priyanka Ganguly's time on the student council at her middle school, where an annual Thanksgiving tradition involved donating to a local shelter. That visit proved to be an eye-opener, as she witnessed the struggles faced by children who lacked access to basic food and supplies. Determined to make a difference, she founded TrillionAngels (www.trillionangels.org)

This was three years ago. Currently a senior at Milpitas High, she continues her work.

The fundraising began with bake sales but soon turned into a passionate movement as she enlisted like-minded high schoolers across four high schools in the bay area and increased the scope of fundraisers.

Targeting a bigger, global impact, she began forging connections with international youth shelters. The collective energy of TrillionAngels has grown, and so has the impact.

Over \$6000 and more than 300 items have been donated to children in five countries: Vietnam, Philippines, India, Australia, Ukraine. "It's been really transformative. You learn a lot when you're collaborating with people who are just as dedicated as you are in doing good," said Priyanka. "This experience has transformed me into an even more collaborative, resourceful and driven leader."

FIA, AHF Celebrate India's 77th Year In Long Beach, CA

India-West Staff Reporter

LONG BEACH, CA - The Federation of Indian American Associations (FIA) and the American Hindu Federation (AHF) jointly celebrated India's 77th Independence Day. The event was held in the auditorium of Jordan High School, here.

A flag hoisting ceremony was done in the presence of well-known community members including Avadesh Agarwal, Dr. Krishna Reddy, Ishwar Deedwania, Ajoy Dubey, Charu Shivkumar, Rachna Srivastava, Manoj Agarwal, and Arun Dutt.

The program, which started with Ganesh Stuti, showcased the diversity of India with dances from Maharashtra, Bengal, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Odisha, and other states. The event had all genres including classical, Bollywood, and patriotic dances.

Vini Gora rendered patriotic songs that moved the audience and then provided entertainment with Punjabi and Bollywood hit songs.

The program was conducted by Rachna Srivastava and Charu Sivakumar in a very efficient manner.

Outside the hall, there were about 24 booths packed with all manner of services, from henna to insurance, and food being offered.



Ishwar Deedwania, FIA President, thanked everyone for their presence and congratulated the volunteers who had worked to put the event together to make it a community one.



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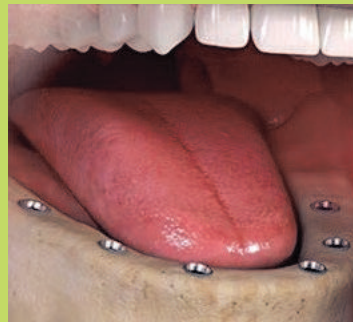
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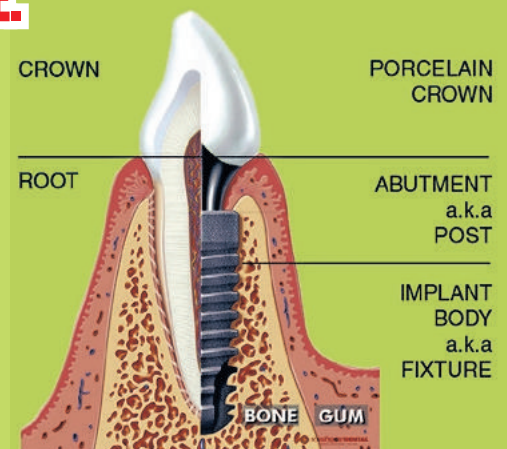


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San Diego's Indian Fine Arts Celebrates Youth

India-West Staff Reporter

LA JOLLA, CA - The Indian Fine Arts Academy of San Diego (IFAASD) held its annual North American Youth Festival from September 1-3 at the David and Dorothea Garfield Theater, here. Now in its sixth year, the Youth Festival has grown significantly both in terms of scope and length.

As noted by the Chief Guest, Sangita Acharya T.S.R. Krishnan, this festival demonstrated IFAASD's commitment to cultivating a new generation of artists and connoisseurs of Indian classical music and dance. The young performers were selected competitively to perform in front of over 3,000 attendees over the course of this three-day festival.

The lineup featured talented young artists between the ages of 15 and 27 who live in North America and India. The concerts themselves showcased talented vocalists and instrumentalists – including violinists, a pianist, and a saxophonist – performing both Carnatic and Hindustani music, as well as exquisite dancers performing Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Kuchipudi, and regional folk dance styles.



Chief Guest TSR Krishnan who was honored at the event.

The festival also shone a spotlight on dedicated music and dance students from San Diego and celebrated exemplary achievement in arts through three special concerts: a vocal concert by Vignesh Ishwar, a Bharatanatyam duet by Renjith and Vigna, and a dance production by 16 students of Guru Rathna Kumar of Anjali Performing Arts.

Krishnan maintained that due to cost considerations, it has usually been the norm in several organizations to simply tag a youth performance before the billed event, but IFAASD had taken it upon itself to showcase talent despite challenges. In his speech, during which he was honored by the organizers, he said the challenge now lay with audiences to support IFAASD in its quest to

support talent and promote culture. He urged them to do this by simply showing up and being involved as audience members.

Throughout the festival, young students and performers had the phenomenal opportunity to be immersed in Indian music and dance and interact with senior artists and teachers in an intimate setting. The festive energy was even reflected in the cuisine as concert-goers and performers were treated to a wide range of Indian regional delicacies throughout the event.

IFAASD President Shekar Viswanathan said the organization looks forward and warmly invites young artists to apply for a performance opportunity for the 2024 festival.

Anup Jalota To Perform In Irvine On Sept.24

India-West Staff Reporter

IRVINE, CA - Ektaa Center, in partnership with the Dhvani Academy of Percussion will present 'RagaSpirit OC 2023' on Sept. 24 at 6 pm, at the Irvine Barclay Theater, here featuring Padmashri Anup Jalota in a vocal concert accompanied by Pt. Tarun Bhattacharya on santoor and Pt. Abhijit Banerjee on tabla.

'Bhajan Samrat' Jalota is one of India's most prolific vocalists. Taking an ethnomusicologist's approach to preserving India's traditional music he has released two extensive collections of music in the Sanskrit language. Some of his hits include "Aisi

Lagi Lagan," "Rang De Chunariya," and "Maiya Mori Mein Nahin Makhani Khayo". Bhattacharya is one of the most celebrated torchbearers of Indian classical music and Banerjee and his Tarang ensemble is known for his focus on Indian percussion. Both have dazzled on world music stages.

"RagaSpirit OC 2023 is a vision not an event. We continue our ongoing effort to bring a confluence of understanding between academia, artistry and audiences and create connections within communities using the powerful medium of music" said Harish Murthy, Executive Director of the Ektaa Center.

For more: (949) 300-8912 or visit www.ektaacenter.org and www.dhwaniacademy.us

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Patel Shippers, Suppliers To Grocery Stores, Made To Pay Back Wages



HOMESTEAD, FL (IANS) - The US Department of Labor announced it has recovered more than \$71,047 in back wages and liquidated damages from a Florida-based Indian company, which denied overtime pay to 25 of its workers.

Patel Shippers LLC, which provides Indian fruits and vegetables to grocery stores in 10 US states, paid straight-time rates for all hours worked, including for hours over 40 in a workweek, Labor's Wage and Hour Division found.

The employer also failed to pay three workers at least the federal minimum wage by not keeping an accurate record of hours worked, in violation of the Fair Labor Standards Act. The company was first registered to do business in Florida in 1985 and is run by President Ashish Patel and Vice President Ramanbhai Patel, the Miami Herald report-

ed, citing state records. The company website describes Patel Shippers as an "Indian and oriental vegetable and fruit supplier".

"Employers have a legal obligation to pay workers for all the hours that they work. When they fail to do so they may owe back wages and liquidated damages," said Anthony Delgado, Wage and Hour Division Acting District Director, Miami.

The company delivers fruit and vegetables to stores and grocers in Miami, Sunrise, West Palm Beach, Arizona, California, Georgia, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Texas. The investigators from the Wage and Hour Division learned of the Patel Shipper's malpractices via the Employment Education and Outreach alliance, which addresses the concerns of immigrants who aren't familiar with workplace rights in the US.

Former Anaheim Mayor Harry Sidhu Faces Jail

Contd. from P1

in exchange for pushing through the stadium's land sale.

Sidhu, a Republican and vociferous Donald Trump supporter, was planning a reelection campaign. The plea agreement, filed on August 16 in the U.S. District Court in Santa Ana, reveals that Sidhu initially denied any expectation of benefits from the buyer in exchange for facilitating the stadium sale. However, the evidence presented suggests that Sidhu was anticipating a hefty campaign contribution from the purchaser, contingent upon the successful completion of the sale.

Sidhu was caught on an FBI recording making these claims, seemingly unaware that he was being monitored. In a conversation with an Angels representative, Sidhu was overheard stating his intention to secure a million-dollar contribution for his re-election campaign after sealing the stadium deal.

The plea agreement also reveals Sidhu's involvement in leaking city information to the Angels' negotiating team and destroying public records concerning the stadium's land sale.

The agreement, the Los Angeles Times pointed out, offers an "extraordinary look" inside Sidhu's years-long efforts to sell the stadium for \$320 million that attracted local controversy and, eventually, the attention of the FBI. The efforts extended even to

a mock City Council meeting to rehearse talking points.

The counts of false statements and wire fraud against Sidhu are also related to his purchase of a helicopter in 2020. The plea agreement says the Indian American registered the helicopter at an Arizona address, to avoid paying more than \$15,000 in California sales tax.

While Sidhu's formal guilty plea is pending, a spokesperson from the U.S. Department of Justice anticipates this step will be taken in the coming weeks.

"Mr. Sidhu was elected by and pledged to work for the residents of Anaheim, but he violated that pledge and their trust on numerous occasions to look out for special interests," said Donald Alway, the Assistant Director in Charge of the FBI's Los Angeles Field Office.

"Mr. Sidhu deceived his colleagues and weakened the city's official strategy by divulging intellectual property, then lied to the government when his corruption was discovered. I'm proud of the hard work put in by agents and prosecutors which resulted in today's plea agreement."

The repercussions of this case extend beyond Sidhu alone. The Angels, implicated in the alleged deal, deny any wrongdoing, citing both the plea agreement and an independent corruption probe report.

However, city investigators note the Angels' lack of cooperation in their examination, the Voice of OC reported.



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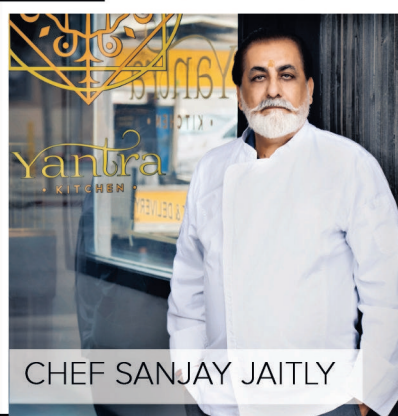
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Tuesday, September 19th, 2023 - Friday, September 20th, 2023

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UIASC Celebrate India's Independence Day

Buena Park, CA, August 19, 2023. The United Indian Associations of Southern California (UIASC) celebrated the 77th Independence Day of India on 19th August with great patriotic zeal and fervor at Jain Center, Buena Park, California. This was a grand patriotic celebration of the Independence Day of India that was organized by representations from most of the Indian American Associations of Southern California under one umbrella called UIASC.

This year was a one-of-a-kind celebration by bringing together two fascinating worlds: "Cultural Intelligence vs Artificial Intelligence. The ceremony was attended by more than 800 Indian Diaspora members, and friends of India. The event commenced at around 5:00 pm with a social hour including snacks and appetizers until 6:00 pm during which Unity March was organized around the auditorium by the organizing committee with Indian Tricolor flags and US National Flags that was attended by the committee members and the audience alike emceed by Mrs. Charu Shiva Kumar, Founder and President of Excel Foundation.



The official program began at 6:00 pm with an introductory keynote for the program by Veteran Community Leader & Chairman of Parks and Recreation Commission for the City of Cerritos Mr. Ashok (Pat) Patnaik who gracefully introduced the six Conveners for the program who had planned and executed every step of the event with help from every committee member for UIASC. The Conveners for the program were 1) Seasoned Community Leader, Founder & President of Lions Club of Little India and GOPIO-OC Mr. Amrit Bhandari, 2) Veteran Community Leader, Founder and President of GOPIO-LA and Rajput Association of America and Retired Boeing Engineer Mr. Kewal Kanda, 3) Retired Physician and Founder and President of Global Peace Foundation & UNA-USA Long Beach Chapter Dr. Manorama S. Gupta, 4) Long Time Community Leader and Founder & President of a number of community organizations including Step2StepUp Mrs. Vasu Pawar, 5) A Young face in Southern California and President of Kalanjali Mrs. Rajeshwari Kulkarni and finally 6) the Dynamic Community leader in Southern California and Founder & President of Vedic American Foundation and in leadership position with a dozens of community organization, US President's Volunteer Service Awardee, Scientist & Professor of Biomedical Informatics Dr. Sukrit Mukherjee.

The UIASC Committee members were introduced on the stage by another enthusiastic Community Leader and a Professor of Mathematics, Mrs. Yatri Shukla. Dignitaries invited were Honorable Mayor Arthur C. Brown from the City of Buena Park, Ali Sajjad Taj, a Councilmember from the City of Artesia. Honorable Congresswoman Young Kim, a Member of the US Congress, 40th District who was represented by her staff members. Another invited dignitary and the Grand Sponsor of the Event was Mr. Avadhesh Agarwal. Honorable Mayor Arthur C. Brown bestowed upon the UIASC a new resolution from the City of Buena Park and recognized UIASC in the city of Buena Park.

All dignitaries along with UIASC Conveners performed lamp-lighting to begin the program along with the unfurling of the tricolor National Flag. This was followed by the singing of the US & Indian National Anthem. The American National anthem was sung by Aditi Bhattacharya and the Indian National anthem by Rajeshwari Kulkarni who was joined by the audience in singing the Indian National Anthem.

The event showcased some glimpses of the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speech from Red Fort, New Delhi that took place on August 15, 2023.

A long-term Community leader and Former President of NFIA and a Retired Boeing Engineer Mr. Sudip Gorakshakar provided an overview of Indian growth & progress in the last 77 years in various sectors, followed by the presentation by the youth on an exciting discussion of their vision of India after 25 years including a question & answer session by an 11th grader Jasmine Sivakumaran and a 9th grader Sujash Mukherjee.

In an exclusive interview, the Mayor of Buena Park, Arthur Brown mentioned: "I welcome this organization (UIASC) to the city, I have been coming to the Jain Center for 20 years & I am very thankful to the Indian community to promote cultural diversity in the city, appreciate the positive work that the Indian Diaspora has been doing."

The cultural program was emceed by seasoned cultural director Mrs. Vasu Pawar along with Mrs. Rajeshwari Kulkarni who together introduced the concept of Artificial intelligence in the backdrop of Indian Cultural Intelligence. The cultural event was presented by Ashi Naren from Dance Dewane which included a classical dance with the transition to Artificial Intelligence which was the theme of this year's celebration!



The colorful & vibrant Garba dance was performed by the Diwdi dance group led by another community leader turned choreographer Mrs. Surekha Modi, followed by a mesmerizing performance by students of veteran dance teacher Paulomi Pandit of the Ranga Shree Dance Academy.

The event included a unique live instrumental classical music, by Pusthakam Ramaa & Musicians from India that included Pusthakam Ramaa (vocal), P Janardhana Rao (Mridangam), KS Jayaram (Flute), MS Manjunathan (Rhythm pad). Kalaimamani Dr. Sinduri's "Savithri Arts Academy" students performed patriotic performance & unique cultural offerings, including classical Bharatanatyam, vibrant folk dance, and an unforgettable patriotic number by youngsters on the classic kids' song "Nanha Munna Rahi Hoon" which enthralled the audiences.

A unique cultural program was presented by Vinaini Jayasinghe that mesmerized the audience who performed various dance forms including bhangra. The program also included a dance by young artist Shreya Mukherjee, a 3rd grader who danced to the tune of a famous song written by national poet of India Rabindranath Tagore that was choreographed by Jayesha Mukherjee (the dancer's mother).

The program finale was amazing and had incredible performances by several local artists and with renditions of patriotic songs.

The guests especially enjoyed the Indian refreshments and dinner served free to all in attendance at the event. Overall, this was a patriotic celebration with enthusiasm and patriotic fervor.

India's Independence Day celebration exhibited India's might and magnificence, filling us with endless pride. conveyed their greetings on the momentous occasion. Prominent members of the Indo-American community including representatives of various socio-cultural organizations, members of the business community, and others also expressed their felicitations. It was a grand patriotic event with a one-of-a-kind experience that was enlightening and entertaining.

The committee members who had worked tirelessly along with the Conveners include Aparna Hande, Ashok (Pat) Patnaik, Ashok Madan, A. J. Dudheker, Bani Mukherjee, Bharat Shah, Charu Shivakumar, Dr. Pradip Shukla, Kalaimamani Dr. Sinduri, Dr. Rangesh Gadasalli, Geeta Bhatt, Harish Dhruv, Hasmukh Modi, Hark Vasa, Keshav Patel, Kamlesh Chauhan, Nila Parikh, Priya Kumar, Radhika Patel, Rajinder Dhunna, Ramesh Ramnani, Surekha Modi, Sunil Garg, Sudip Gorakshakar, Sunila Shah, Viiay Patil, Vinod Dudheker & Yatri Shukla.

Bakersfield Dentist Caught Stealing Covid Relief Money



BAKERSFIELD, CA (IANS) - A 46-year-old dental surgeon has pleaded guilty to stealing \$500,000 in Covid-19 relief money and using it for personal expenditures, such as investments.

Ranjan Rajbanshi, who ran a dental practice here and in Santa Barbara, received over \$850,000 in Covid relief money from the Small Business Administration (SBA) and the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) from April 2020 through February 2022.

He represented to the government that he would only use the relief money for specified business purposes such as facility costs, payroll, and protective equipment for him and his staff, the US attorney's office for the Eastern District of California stated. Rajbanshi subsequently used \$500,000 of the relief money for improper personal expenditures such as investments.

He has agreed to pay that money back to the government before his sentencing. He

is scheduled to be sentenced by US District Judge Ana de Alba on December 4 and faces a maximum statutory penalty of 10 years in prison and a fine of \$250,000.

The actual sentence, however, will be determined at the discretion of the court after consideration of any applicable statutory factors and the Federal Sentencing Guidelines, which take into account a number of variables.

Last month, around 14 people, including several Indian American business owners and employees, were charged in a \$53 million fraud scheme involving a Covid-19 pandemic relief program in Texas.

The case was considered the largest investigated by the Pandemic Response Accountability Committee (PRAC) Fraud Task Force thus far. Set up on May 17, 2021, the task force bolsters efforts to investigate and prosecute the most culpable domestic and international criminal actors and assists agencies tasked with administering relief programs to prevent fraud.

Embezzling: Varun Aggarwal Of Newport Beach Faces Jail

NEWPORT BEACH, CA - (IANS) - A 41-year-old Indian American former executive has pleaded guilty to embezzling more than \$2.7 million from his employer.

Varun Aggarwal, who worked at a commercial real estate agency here, pleaded guilty on August 22 to one count of wire fraud for submitting fictitious invoices for companies controlled by his family and friends, whose services never were performed.

Aggarwal's sentencing is scheduled for January 22, 2024, and he faces a statutory maximum sentence of 20 years in federal prison.

According to his plea agreement, from 2008 to January 2022, Aggarwal worked in the internal auditing department of the Newport Beach-based KBS Realty Advisors and rose to the level of the department's director.

Beginning at least as early as January 2012 and continuing until January 2022, Aggarwal used his position at KBS to embezzle his employer's money, the Department of Justice statement said.

As a member of the company's internal auditing group, Aggarwal was familiar with KBS's policies and procedures for payments to vendors.

He used his knowledge of KBS's policies and procedures to have his friends and fam-



ily serve as approved vendors to do contracting work for KBS.

After several of these companies became approved vendors for KBS, Aggarwal used these approved vendors to submit fraudulent invoices for consulting services that were not performed for the company.

He then funneled the payments on the invoices from KBS to his own bank accounts -- through the approved vendors -- at times without informing the vendors that the invoices and the payments on the invoices were for his own benefit.

In carrying out this scheme, Aggarwal fraudulently obtained nearly \$2,729,718 from KBS that he caused it to pay to the approved vendors that ultimately went to himself.

He resigned from KBS in January 2022 after the company began investigating the invoices, according to court documents.

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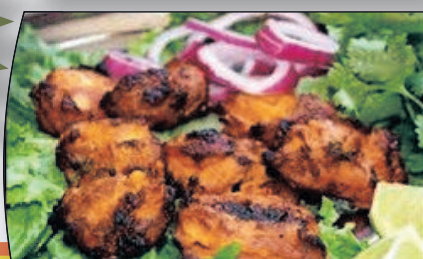


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PEOPLE

US Open: "3-PEAT!" Says Rajeev Ram Making History By Clinching The Doubles Title

India-West News Desk

NEW YORK, NY – Rajeev Ram and Joe Salisbury made tennis history by becoming the first team in the Open Era to secure three consecutive doubles titles at the US Open. The American-British duo triumphed over the formidable pair of Matthew Ebden and the 43-year-old Rohan Bopanna of India in a thrilling encounter that ended with a scoreline of 2-6, 6-3, 6-4.

Rajeev Ram and Joe Salisbury's journey to this historic victory was marked by a remarkable winning streak in New York, having previously claimed the titles in 2021 and 2022. Their stellar partnership has seen them lift four major titles together, including the 2020 Australian Open.

Ram, who grew up in Carmel, Indiana was emotional while reflecting on his journey and the significance of their achievement, stating, "I have been lucky enough to come here every year since I was 14... It is something I could never have thought of in my wildest dreams, and I have got to thank so many people, but especially my partner." Now 34, this is Ram's first Grand Slam title.

Salisbury praised their partnership, saying, “This partnership is special... we know we are going to give it our all, fight hard, and give it our best until the very



Rajeev Ram posted this image of the pair's three victories.

end. That is what we did today.”

In a match played in scorching heat at Arthur Ashe Stadium, Raman and Salisbury improved their returns as the battle raged on, consistently pressuring their opponents at the net. They saved all four break points they faced in the second and third sets, ultimately converting two crucial opportunities to clinch victory.

Rohan Bopanna

However, amidst the intense competition, it was sportsmanship that shone brightly. Despite facing defeat, Rohan Bopanna displayed exceptional integrity at a crucial juncture in the third set, acknowledging a foul on himself when the umpire missed an infringement. This gesture won Bopanna accolades from Ram who specifically brought it up at the winners ceremony, saying, "Rohan and I are close... It just shows what kind of guy he is and how deserving he is at this point in his career playing for these kinds of titles. You are an inspiration to all of us."

Bopanna had been aiming to secure his maiden major trophy, having narrowly missed out in the US Open final in 2010. Matthew Ebden, his partner, was also vying for his second Grand Slam crown after winning at Wimbledon in 2022.

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10 Indian American Women On Forbes 50 Over 50 List

NEW YORK, NY (IANS) - As many as 10 Indian American women have earned their place on the Forbes 50 Over 50 List, showcasing their accomplishments across diverse domains such as gender equality, financing book clubs, and investing in sustainable seafood extraction. They share the space with notable achievers like Oscar-winning Hollywood star Jamie Lee Curtis, US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo, Republican Party presidential hopeful Nikki Haley, and Adena Friedman, Chair and CEO of Nasdaq.

The list comprises 200 women categorized into groups of 50, each representing four distinct areas: Lifestyle, featuring Jamie Lee Curtis as a prominent figure.

Impact, led by Raimondo and Harvard University President Claudine Gay. Innovation, headlined by Peggy Whitson, the first woman to command the International Space Station and holder of the record for the most days (675) spent in space. Investment, topped by Nancy Pfund, an early supporter of electric-car manufacturer Tesla.

The largest representation of Indian American women appears in the Investment list, including:

Geeta Aiyer, founder and president of Boston Common Asset Management, a sustainable investment firm with \$5 billion in assets under management (AUM).

Mala Gaonkar, founder of SurgoCap Partners, a New York investment firm focusing on disruptive technologies.

Ranji Nagaswami, chief strategy officer



Clockwise: Alka Joshi, S. Mona Sinha, Monica Jain, Sarita Mohanty.

of Strategic Value Partners, a global investment company managing nearly \$18 billion in private credit.

Purnima Puri, governing partner at HPS Investment Partners, a \$100 billion-AUM

global investment firm, where she leads the company's \$22-billion liquid credit business.

In the Impact category, where well-known figures such as feminist writer

Gloria Steinem and Fulton County District Attorney Fanni Willis are featured, the three Indian Americans honored are:

Sarita Mohanty, CEO and president of The SCAN Foundation, a California-based healthcare nonprofit.

Ghazal Qureshi, founder of UpBrainery Technologies, expanding online education through AI and machine learning.

S. Mona Sinha, global executive director of Equality Now, an NGO advocating for women's and girls' rights and protection worldwide.

On the Lifestyle list, Alka Joshi shares recognition with notable figures such as Jamie Lee Curtis, Viola Davis, Annie Leibowitz, and Lisa Vanderpump. Notably, Alka Joshi gained prominence in 2020 when her debut novel, 'The Henna Artist,' became a global phenomenon, earning a spot on the 'New York Times' bestseller list and being adapted into a television series by Netflix.

In the Innovation category, which includes Nobel Prize winner Carolyn Bertozzi and Oracle CEO Safra Catz, two Indian Americans are celebrated:

Monica Jain, founder and executive director of Fish 2.0 and Manta Consulting Inc., fostering a network focused on ocean conservation and sustainable seafood.

Padmasree Warrior, founder-CEO of Fable, a platform for social reading and book clubs, who also serves on the boards of Microsoft and Spotify and maintains a significant presence on Twitter.

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Haley Only Republican Who Can Defeat Biden: Poll



WASHINGTON, DC (IANS) - Nikki Haley has emerged as the only Republican presidential candidate who can beat President Joe Biden in the 2024 US elections, a new poll has revealed.

Haley, the only woman running for the Republican nomination, had a six percentage-point lead over Biden in a CNN/SSRS poll released on Thursday, with the President trailing Haley 49 percent to 43 percent in a hypothetical match between the two.

"Hypothetical matchups suggest there would be no clear leader should Biden face one of the other

major Republican contenders, with one notable exception: Biden runs behind former South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley," CNN reported. The Haley campaign welcomed the polls saying: "This poll confirms what many Democrats and Republicans are saying: Democrats are terrified of running against Nikki Haley." "Nikki Haley is our best hope in taking back the White House. We only have one shot. It's time to play to win," Ken Farnaso, Haley's Press Secretary, said responding to the CNN poll.

Fresh out of the first Republican primary debate late last month,

Haley told CBS News that she, and not Trump, is going to be the party's 2024 presidential nominee.

According to the CNN polls, the other Republican candidates polled neck-and-neck with Biden with former president Donald Trump, who is widely ahead in the party primary, drawing 47 percent against Biden's 46 percent. On a potential rematch between Trump and Biden, 47 percent of those polled said they would choose the former President and

46 percent said they would choose the latter. In contrast, 44 percent said that any Democratic nominee would be better than Trump, while 38 percent said the former President is better than any Democratic pick.

Former Vice President Mike Pence and Senator Tim Scott both drew 46 percent to Biden's 44 percent, and New Jersey Governor Chris Christie received 44 percent to Biden's 42 percent. Florida Governor Ron DeSantis tied with Biden at 47 percent, while Indian-American entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy trailed at 45 percent against Biden's 46 percent.

In Sacramento, CA Governor Gavin Newsom Urged To Veto Caste Bill

India-West Staff Reporter

SACRAMENTO, CA - Hundreds of Hindus gathered here to protest an anti-caste discrimination bill, which they say will further fuel instances of Hinduphobia if signed into law.

The SB 403 bill, which seeks to

first state in the US to add caste as a protected category in its anti-discrimination laws.

Sharing videos and images from the peaceful protest, in a press release, the advocacy group, Coalition of Hindus of North America (CoHNA), wrote, "Gavin Newsom, we hope you see how deeply con-



outlaw caste-based discrimination in the state, was passed in the California Senate last week with an overwhelming 31-5 votes and now rests with Governor Gavin Newsom for clearance.

Holding banners and placards, the group, on September 9, urged Newsom to veto the bill, which if signed, will make California the

cerned our community is about this bill and its potential impact on us".

Asserting that the bill seeks to "silence" the Hindus, CoHNA said that SB 403 "is not facially neutral, allows for the targeting and profiling of Hindus and violates our civil rights".

"Caste" is not neutral like race, *Contd. on P28*

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Irony: Trump Advises Vivek Ramaswamy To “Hold It In,” Be “Less Controversial”

WASHINGTON, DC (IANS) - Former US President Donald Trump, who can be controversial with his remarks as annulling the constitution, in an unusual outreach to fellow Republican Vivek Ramaswamy advised him to “be a little bit careful” with what you say, so you aren’t “controversial”.

Trump, who is now the GOP frontrunner despite four indictments and two civil cases against him, praised the political newcomer as a ‘smart guy’ with ‘a lot of talent’. Vivek Ramaswamy has been gaining a lot of traction with his Trump-like views on climate change, Ukraine funding, and border issues and has openly said he wants to be his running mate, thereby catching his attention.

Media reports said that Vivek Ramaswamy being booed at the Milwaukee debate reminded audiences of the way Trump was booed in his 2016 debate when he said he did not need donors or special interests for his campaign. He won the 2016 election in a surprise twist defeating democrat Hillary Clinton.

Former President Trump has offered unsolicited advice to his GOP rival Vivek Ramaswamy, who has managed to get a lot of attention in recent weeks from not just the Indian diaspora, but Republican voters and most importantly Trump’s attention.

Trump was asked on a TV show recently whether he was considering a “Vice President Ramaswamy” as he was watching the first Republican presidential debate last week, reports said.

“Well, I think he’s great. Look, anybody that said, I’m the best president in a generation. I don’t know, you must define a generation. That’s a long time,” Trump quipped. “He said it a couple of times. And he said it in 100 years. So, I have to like a guy like that. You know, I can’t get upset with him,” Trump said.

Trump hailed Ramaswamy as being a “smart,” “young guy” and a “very intelligent person” who has “a lot of



talent” and “good energy”.

“He could be some form of something, I’d tell you. I think he’d be very good. I think he’s very good. I think he’s really distinguished himself,” Trump said. However, the GOP frontrunner went on to warn the political newcomer that he was becoming “a little bit controversial”.

“He’s starting to get out there a little bit. He’s a little bit -- getting a little bit controversial. I’d tell him to be a little bit careful. Some things you must hold in just a little bit, right?” Trump said before adding “But he’s got a lot of good energy, and he’s been very nice to me.”

Caste Bill

Contd. from P27

religion, gender, ethnicity, ancestry, and other categories. And, existing California laws can already address any claims of caste discrimination,” CoHNA said, urging Newsom to “stand on the right side of history.”

The bill, introduced by Senator Aisha Wahab in March, adds caste as a protected category to an existing law, the Unruh Civil Rights Act, which provides that all people in the state of California are entitled to the full and equal accommodations, advantages, facilities, privileges, or services in all business establishments.

“We want to ensure organizations and companies do not entrench caste discrimination in their practices or policies, and in order to do that we need to make it plainly clear that discrimination based on caste is against the law,” Wahab had said in March 2023. Just after the passage in the California State Assembly, its supporters went on a hunger strike asking Newsom to sign it into law as soon as possible.

The office of Governor Newsom told BBC that he would evaluate the bill when it reaches his desk. Before its passage in California’s senate, the bill had cleared the State Assembly late last month with a 55-3 vote, a sign of broad support.

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Pew Poll: Globally, India Viewed Positively

WASHINGTON, DC (IANS) – A poll conducted among people in more than 23 countries showed that India is generally viewed favorably by the world.

The poll also found that while most Indians said their country's global influence has grown stronger in recent years, the rest of the world disagreed, and either saw no change in India's standing or saw it get weaker.

At home in India, the 24th country polled for this survey, Prime Minister Narendra Modi held a commanding double-digit lead over his key challenger for the premiership, Rahul Gandhi of the Congress.

The multi-nation poll was conducted by the Pew Research Center to assess India's image in the world in the year of India's presidency of the G-20, whose leaders will congregate in a few days in New Delhi for their annual summit.

Pew polled 28,250 people in 23 countries between March and May, and 2,611 in In-

dia, over the phone and Internet and in face-to-face interviews.

The survey report released on August 29 showed that a median of 46 percent of the respondents held a favorable view of India and a median of 34 percent held an unfavorable view.

Views about India were most positive in Israel (71 percent), followed by the United Kingdom (66 percent), Kenya (60 percent), Nigeria (60 percent), South Korea (58 percent), Japan (55 percent), Australia (52 percent), the United States (51 percent), and Canada (47 percent).

Holding a positive view of India did not, however, translate to believing India's global clout is growing.

Only 29 percent of the Israelis, 34 percent of the respondents in the UK, 32 percent in Japan, and 23 percent in the US said India's clout has grown in recent years. In contrast, 68 percent of



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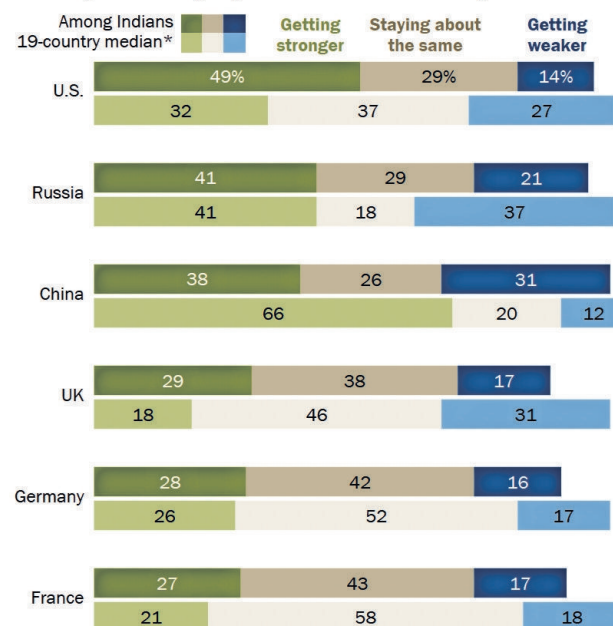
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Indians are more inclined than others to see the U.S. as becoming more influential, China as less influential

% who say each country's influence in the world in recent years has been ...



*Median percentages based on data from 2022.
Note: Those who did not answer are not shown. Percentages for France, Germany, the U.S., and the UK include evaluations from those survey publics.
Source: Spring 2023 Global Attitudes Survey. Q14a-f. Spring 2022 Global Attitudes Survey. Q14a-c, e-g.
"Views of India Lean Positive Across 23 Countries"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Indians polled for the survey said their country's global influence has grown in recent times.

Countries that did not view India positively were led surprisingly by South Africa (51 percent saw India unfavorably), the Netherlands (48 percent), Spain (49 percent), and Austria (45 percent).

In India, Modi turned in a chart-busting lead of 17 percentage points over Rahul Gandhi with 79 percent to 62 percent; he was also way ahead of other Congress leaders like Mallikarjun Kharge and Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury.

The poll was started just before Rahul Gan-

dhi was removed from the Parliament for his conviction in a defamation case (he has since been reinstated) and wrapped up before the Karnataka election results that gave a new thrust to the Congress party and its leader.

This poll may not be an updated reflection of the mood in India, having been conducted three months and many critical developments ago.

In other findings of the survey, Indians said they believed both the US and Russia -- and they had a positive view of the country and its leader Vladimir Putin -- had grown in influence in recent years. Four in 10 Indians said they felt China's influence has grown stronger in contrast to three in 10 who said it has become weaker.

Views about Pakistan were predictably hostile. About seven in 10 Indians have an unfavorable view of Pakistan, with 57 percent of them being very unfavorable towards Pakistan.

Merely 19% of Indians have a favorable view of their western neighbors.

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What's In A Name? Meluha, Bharat, India...

Contd. from P1

legitimacy. India, as we have known it for decades, is a name most popularly used by the British, but its origin goes way back to the times when the concept of colonizing did not even exist.

Over two millennia ago when the Persians reached the Sindhu River (later anglicized as Indus), they mispronounced it as 'Hindu', and so the land beyond the 'Hindu' came to be known as Hindustan, and its people began to be called Hindustani.

Hindustan was the preferred name for the subcontinent used by the Persians, Greeks, Delhi Sultans, and the Mughals, and the name not only remains in use but also continues to carry a lot of cultural weight, especially with regard to music and literature.

Going back to ancient references to India, it was around 300 BCE when Megasthenes, the ambassador of the Greek ruler Seleucus Nikator I in the court of Chandragupta Maurya, wrote of India in his book 'Indica', which survived in fragments reconstructed by modern historians.

Around 200 BCE, Chanakya in his 'Arthashastra' refers to the Indian subcontinent as 'Jambudweepa', inspired by the jamun fruit, native to this region and climate. 'Jambudweep' follows and

refers to the combined Aryavarta and Dravida, two regions marked by a riparian divide.

From the time of the Vedas, the seers of the age called the northern half of the subcontinent Aryavarta and the southern half



Dravida. Both these regions are recorded in Manu Smriti and the Puranas, where Aryavarta (meaning 'the land of the noble') is described as the region that stretches from the Himalayas in the north to the Vindhyas, which stretch from modern-day Gujarat to Madhya Pradesh, on to Varanasi, and from the Bay of Bengal to the Arabian Sea.

Dravida is said to have been mentioned as the land towards

the south where three great bodies of water conflate: the Indian Ocean, Arabian Sea, and Bay of Bengal. The name Dravida is a 'sandhi' word that combines 'dravya' (meaning water) and 'vida' (a place of meeting).

With more rulers came more names: Nabhivarsha, Ilavativarsha, and Bharatavarsha, to name a few. Bharatavarsha, however, is a much older name than Bharat, which is now a popular alternative name for India. It is said to have existed between the first and ninth centuries BCE.

Bharat is a name that is mentioned

in the much older Rig Veda (circa 1500 BCE). It mentions a Bharata clan as the principal tribe of the region, which is now north India.

Additionally, Bharat follows from king Bharata, heir to the Kuru dynasty, and the son Dushyant and Shakuntala, thereby connected to the epic Mahabharata.

Going further back, there is Meluha or Melukhka, the Sumerian name of a prominent trading partner of the region in the Middle

Bronze Age. Although Meluha has not been conclusively identified, most scholars associate it with the Indus Valley Civilization.

Sumer is the earliest known civilization in the southern Mesopotamian region, which is now largely south-central Iraq. Sumer is said to have emerged during the Chalcolithic and early Bronze Ages between the sixth and fifth millennium BCE.

A popular novel by Amish Tripathi, 'The Immortals of Meluha' (Westland Press, 2010), describes Meluha as an empire covering the modern Indian regions of Kashmir, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Delhi, Haryana, Rajasthan, Gujarat and the entire Pakistan along with parts of eastern Afghanistan.

Fast forward to modern times, in 1947, when the British withdrew from this colony, there were three names that coexisted and interchangeably used by the leaders of our freedom struggle: India, Hindustan, and Bharat.

In fact, Mahatma Gandhi was all in favor of Hindustani being the country's national language, as did Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose.

In 1949, when the Constitution was drafted, the official name of the country was also decided. While there remained indecisiveness over choosing Bharat or India, Hindu-

stan was clearly not an option.

In 1950, when the Constitution came into effect, Article 1 confirmed the alternative official name of India: "India, that is Bharat, shall be a Union of States."

This decision, however, was not arrived at without a debate as 'India' was a name given by foreigners, who exploited the land and gave little in return.

India is used in official communications in English, while Bharat is the country's name in nearly all Indian languages. Given this convention, the G20 invites sent out by the 'President of Bharat' are a deviation. While the ruling dispensation denies that the name of the country will be changed, it has made it abundantly clear that Bharat will be used more often in official communications.

Congress stalwart and popular historian Shashi Tharoor agrees that both names carry value, and that "while there is no Constitutional objection to calling India 'Bharat', I hope the government will not be so foolish as to completely dispense with 'India', which has incalculable brand value built up over centuries."

He added: "We should continue to use both words rather than relinquish our claim to a name redolent of history, a name that is recognized around the world."



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Biden, Modi Announce Corridor Linking India & Europe

Contd. from P1
the Middle East, and Asia to construct a major new transit corridor connecting the regions, challenges Beijing’s own efforts at expanding global trade with its Belt Road initiatives. India has been strongly opposed to the latter seeing it as a regional threat from China.
Biden, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced the project during the annual Group of 20 summit of the world’s top economies.

The project is part of an initiative called the Partnership for Global Infrastructure Investment.
Ursula von der Leyen said, “This will be a more direct connection to date between India, the Arabian Gulf, and Europe with a rail link that will make trade between India and Europe 40 percent faster.” She also said that an electricity cable and clean hydrogen pipeline to foster clean energy trade between Asia, the Middle East, and Europe.
Meanwhile, Biden said, “This is a real big deal. Building sus-

tainable, resilient infrastructure, making quality infrastructure investments, and creating a better future... Economic Corridor. You’re going to hear that phrase more than once, I expect, over the next decade. As we work to address infrastructure gaps across low-middle-income countries, we need to maximize the impact of our investments. That’s why a few months ago announced that the United States will work with our partners to invest in economic corridors,” he said.

China Gets More Active In Tibet, India Concerned

NEW DELHI, (IANS) - China’s might and ambition for securing the civilizational nation in all possible ways are well known. The most fundamental step in doing so is by securing the frontiers of a sovereign state -- and in the path to that comes the small Himalayan nation of Tibet.
Clearly, China sees including Tibet as crucial to consolidating its borders and addressing defense concerns from the southwestern direction. In realizing this intent,

many Tibetians and other commentators term Tibet’s reality as a “cultural genocide”.
Historical claims of Tibet being a part of China since the 13th century, Beijing’s policies on Tibet have largely been those of assertiveness and not of consultation.
Tibet had declared independence in 1911 and remained so until 1950 when China decided to “liberate” it. The mounting discontent resulted in the uprising of 1959, which the Chinese



suppressed and consequently, the Dalai Lama fled to India.
Fast forward to present times, in May 2021, a third White Paper was released during the tenure of Chi-

nese President Xi Jinping. It proclaimed that some Western elements intended to disrupt Tibet’s progress.
It additionally emphasizes on maintaining its grip on the Tibetan region, ensuring Chinese control over the selection of the next Dalai Lama, and reinforcing border management and develop-

ment. There is also the aspect of “managing religion in the Chinese context” and “guiding Tibetan Buddhism to adapt to socialist society.”
So, for China to go by its plan means firming up its frontiers—and this plan means extending its authority over Tibet. China is known to handle Tibet with a heavy hand. With this increased precarious proximity to India, the concern is one to heed closely, especially concerning worrisome developments in Doklam and Galwan.

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I Don't Have Anything To Do With Politicians: Vivek Agnihotri

Contd. from P1

The duo was in California on a pre-screening tour of the US of their new celluloid feature that focuses on the making of Covaxin, an Indian-made vaccine developed to fight the scourge of Covid.

Agnihotri was born in Gwalior and attended the Indian Institute of Mass Communication, Bhopal School of Social Sciences, and the Jawaharlal Nehru University. Joshi is a Maharashtrian who was a well-known face on TV and Hindi cinema even before they were married in 1997.

He spoke to *India-West* and true to his public image, Agnihotri came across as quick talking, almost brash. Excerpts:

Q: What has changed for you after 'Kashmir Files'?

A: As a filmmaker and storyteller more people believe in me. I have also found my audience. Another thing is I have security with people carrying guns around me. I live like I am in prison; we can't go out with our children together for dinner. It's not necessarily good to be famous, there is a price to pay.

Q: You have Y-category security after 'Kashmir Files.' Who do you think will be angry with your new film?

A: No. No. So far, the reactions have been positive. People are feeling pride for India, audiences are even crying. Parents love that their children are learning something so positive about India.



Q: Are you testing out the film in LA with the pre-screening?

A: Well, first it was only meant to be in Houston. Then the word got out and it became an 11-city tour. We are not really testing the film but genuinely want to show it to audiences here. The Indian diaspora is the same as audiences in India anyway, whether here, in Europe, or anywhere else. In any case, films should have universal resonance. We will have screenings in India too, but closer to release. We don't want too much discussion, otherwise, it will become stale.

Q: You have said you are broke. You are making patriotic stuff, have you reached out to the government for help?

A: No. Contrary to popular belief, I don't have anything to do with political parties and politicians. It's Pallavi's decision that we live this kind of life - put money into risky projects, meaning no stars but strong research. Why should anyone else participate in that? I need to save every single penny; we count every dollar. We love to struggle! (Chuckling) You start to enjoy the struggle at some point!

Q: You have made films in various genres erotica, thriller, sports, political dramas, and love stories. But your success has come with patriotic films. Is this something you stumbled into?

A: You are right. I have never thought about it that way. When you are young you experiment with different things. You try to impress the world initially, and then you start expressing yourself rather than impressing. You think about what stories can be told that others don't or are afraid to tell. The moment I jumped into telling the truth of controversies I found my song. Actually, my film, 'Buddha in a Traffic Jam' created Vivek Agnihotri 2.0. You can fight and expose but success is judged by money and that happened with 'Kashmir Files.'

Q: In its reaction to you, do you think Bollywood is scared or just doesn't like you?

A: See, the thing about having and making lots and lots of money, is that you are scared of losing it. Same with success. When you run after something then you get scared. But if you think at least one person will watch what you make, then you are okay. They are talented in Bollywood, but they tell stories they assume you want to hear and not what can be told.

Q: What is the job of a movie maker?

A: I call myself a storyteller. I think my Dharma is to keep looking and see what people are talking about, what they don't know and should be told about. You can tell stories about how two

people's eyes meet across a crowd of 10,000 people and they are set forever, but I pick up what I can tell best not what will work with audiences or bring money.

Q: You mentioned you are not into politics. What is the gap between the perception of you being a BJP and Modi person and reality?

A: If I was a friend of Rahul Gandhi, you would say Congress favors me. Of course, who doesn't like to be liked? If the Prime Minister likes me then I am the happiest person. If there is another PM tomorrow and he were to like me, that would be great too. And I don't even know if the PM likes me. Lots of people meet the PM, but it doesn't mean that he likes me because I have met him. I think it's a great thing that the PM likes my work. We don't meet politicians. When 'Kashmir Files' was screened in Uttar Pradesh, the Chief Minister asked to meet. And of course, we did. It does not mean it was an endorsement. Everybody does it. It means nothing. Tell me, which Hollywood director wouldn't want to meet President Biden? The media works out of a template and that's what you hear.

Q: What is the state of the Indian media?

A: Exactly like here or anywhere else. There is right and left; both sides have fake news and stick to their agenda. There might be some differences in the degree of it all.

Q: Tell us about your days in the US when you came to Harvard for a certificate in management.

A: Harvard helps shape your critical thinking. I was very young, and it was the first time I had left the country. Except for pictures of Manhattan, I didn't know anything. Today my daughter knows everything about a place before she leaves home. The social etiquette was different, the civic sense was different as was the food...but I am a quick learner and was able to adapt to the eco-system.

Q: Are you a religious person?

A: If it means rituals, then I am not. I am a very spiritual person.

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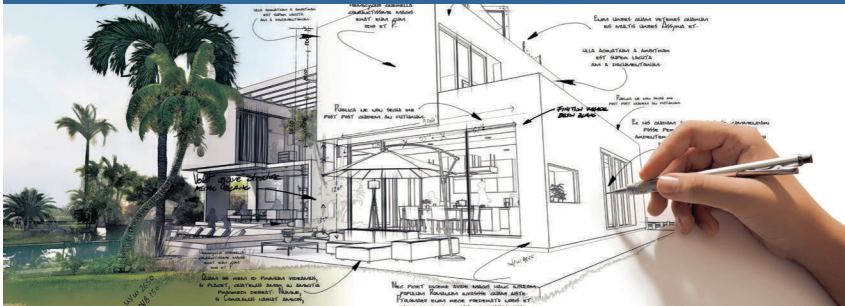
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INTERVIEW

Rising Opera Star Melissa Sondhi Lands Lead Role in 'Romeo and Juliet'

By REENA RATHORE

SAN JOSE, CA – Fueled by passion and perseverance, Melissa Sondhi is embarking on a new artistic endeavor. The Indian

American soprano has landed her dream role in Opera San José's production of Charles Gounod's "Romeo and Juliet." It's the first leading role for the operatic talent who has steadily risen through

the ranks, from a chorister to an emerging new classical voice.

Throughout her young career, she has continued to command the stage, charm audiences, and showcase her powerful and resonant

a vocal coach, told India-West.

After hitting a career milestone and stepping into the spotlight, Sondhi is acutely aware of the challenges that artists of color face before arriving at this moment. Recounting the often-invisible



Photo: David Allen.

Soprano Melissa Sondhi and Joshua Sanders in Opera San José's "Romeo and Juliet" playing Sept. 9–24 at the California Theatre in San Jose, CA.

voice via several featured chorus roles and as an understudy.

A feast of impassioned French music, famous melodies, and a timeless story, "Romeo and Juliet" will be sung in French, with English and Spanish supertitles, Sept. 9–24 at the California Theatre in San Jose. Sondhi goes to great lengths while doing her research to better understand the composer's thought process behind writing the opera. For "Romeo and Juliet," that also meant studying the English translation of the French lyrics.

"You don't want to just be singing the lines; you have to feel the character within yourself, it's so important to truly understand the words before you are ready to perform and make the character your own," Sondhi remarked. "Something that I find helpful is to write out my own version of what I would say as the character in each situation. Since Juliet goes on such an emotional roller coaster and evolves so much throughout the story, this was a particularly helpful tool to me throughout this process. I then worked on my vocal technique with my voice teacher for several months leading up to the rehearsal process."

The Carmel, Indiana, native, who now calls Mountain View, CA, home, is also the first-ever Wadhvani Artist-in-Residence for the South Bay opera company as part of which she will make not one but three role debuts, including Gilda in Verdi's "Rigoletto" and Rosalba in "Florence en el Amazonas."

"One of the things Opera San José feels passionately about is being an incubator not only for operatic talent, but also being a home for South Asian opera artists - from singers to designers to choreographers, and more," Sondhi, who nurtures young talent as

obstacles, Sondhi said for a long time, she simply tried to ignore the fact that she was often one of very few people of color in the rehearsal rooms she worked in.

"I think it was an attempt to cope with the fear that the way I looked could potentially hold me back in my career one day. Over time, however, it became much more difficult to ignore. There are only so many times one can hear that they sing and act an aria beautifully, but they just don't 'fit the bill' before it really starts getting to them," Sondhi recalled to India-West. "I would often wear makeup that made my skin look lighter for auditions, and never really allowed myself to wear any of the Indian jewelry that I loved at risk of looking too different to place on stage in a predominantly white industry."

But over the past few years, she has learned to truly embrace her brown skin, her dark eyes, and the darker bolder lip colors that she loves wearing. "(It) has helped me mold a sense of self-worth and confidence that I've never felt before," she stated.

Music has been a driving force for Sondhi from the age of nine. At home, she was exposed to a wide array of music early on, ranging from Bollywood to Broadway to rap, while her school gave her a variety of performance opportunities.

In 2023, Sondhi won first place in the Adult Classical Voice category at the Los Angeles Semifinals of the Music International Grand Prix competition, making her a star to look out for.

Sondhi spent several years honing her craft, earning a bachelor's degree in music from the University of Michigan School of Music, Theatre and Dance and following it up with a master's degree from the San Francisco Conservatory of Music.

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Sonu Sood Plugs Sugarcane Juice



SAN FRANCISCO, CA (IANS) - Actor and philanthropist Sonu Sood, who is currently shooting for his upcoming action thriller 'Fateh' in the US, has extended his support for the local sugarcane juice business in America.

Sonu shared a video on August 27, wherein he can be seen wearing an all-black outfit. In the video, the viewers can see Sonu saying: "Hamne Hindustan me to bahut saare ganne ke ras nikale hain, lekin aaj ham log America me khade hain, SFO me aur ganne ka ras nikalte hain." The actor can be seen making the juice himself. He captioned the video as: "Anyone for sugarcane juice? Straight from America #supportsmallbusiness".

'Fateh' is based on cybercrime. The film is directed by Vaibhav Mishra and stars Sonu and Jacqueline as the lead.

Bay Area Girl Features In CBS's Reality Show 'Survivor'

India-West News Desk

LOS ANGELES, CA - In a much-anticipated revelation, the 45th season of the enduring CBS reality sensation, "Survivor," has disclosed the identities of its 18 intrepid castaways, which includes an Indian American. Set against the captivating backdrop of the picturesque Fijian islands, the new season promises extended 90-minute episodes, slated to premiere on September 27 at 8 p.m.

Among the eclectic mix of contestants, a notable addition is 24-year-old singer and composer, J. Maya.

The young artist shared her exhilaration on social media, declaring, "Little life update: I got to go on an adventure I've been dreaming about since I was a kid!!!! You can watch me this fall on Survivor 45," on her Facebook page.

J. Maya, whose real name is Krishnan-Jha, who lives with



her family in Northern California, first gained recognition for her engaging social media presence, where she captivated audiences with her conversational videos about her life and her love for music and lyrics. She burst onto the TikTok scene in early 2020 with the viral video "Ed Sheeran helped me make

pasta today," quickly becoming one of the world's youngest pun champs.

In late 2021, this Indian American created a singing duet that went viral, amassing over 3 million views. Her TikTok account, j.mayamusic, now boasts 500,000 devoted followers. On Spotify, her track "Achilles Heel" gained momentum in January last year, accumulating over 700,000 monthly listeners.

J. Maya's music, often dubbed "nerd pop" due to her lyrical explorations of diverse topics like crossword puzzles, Greek mythology, and literature, has resonated with millions worldwide. In a promotional video for "Survivor," she shared her excitement, stating, "Millions of people listen to my music, and it is surreal."

Now, as she steps into the thrilling realm of reality television, J. Maya joins a roster of 17 fresh contestants and one returning player in the upcoming 45th season of "Survivor."

SoCal's Raja Kumari Sings For 'Jawan'



LOS ANGELES, CA (IANS) - SoCal rapper Raja Kumari has sung the title track for the Shah Rukh Khan starrer 'Jawan'. After the film's release, she gushed and called the whole experience "mind-blowing."

After the special screening of the movie she said, "I am not just saying this because my song is in there, but I was screaming, I was crying. I won't tell you any secrets, but it is mind-blowing. SRK and RK forever, I love Shah Rukh..."

Now that the movie is out, it is getting rave reviews, and many fans have lauded the 'Jawan Title Track', praising Raja Kumari for bringing in all the necessary swag and attitude. Raja Kumari recently came out with her own album 'The Bridge' with a Bollywood-inspired dance music video for her track, 'Juice'.

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