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JOURNAL

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CA Gets New Indian American Assembly Member



Darshana R. Patel

India-West Staff Reporter

SACRAMENTO, CA – Democrat Dr. Darshana R. Patel officially took the oath of office as the newly elected State As-

semblymember for California's 76th Assembly District. The district encompasses a diverse array of communities, including Escondido, San Marcos, and parts of San Diego, as well as unincorporated areas such as Rancho Santa Fe, Lake San Marcos, and Harmony Grove.

"I am deeply honored to represent the 76th District in the State Assembly and eager to get to work for the people I serve," Patel said. "I take this responsibility very seriously and am determined to deliver results for the residents who placed their trust in me."

Patel declared victory in the competitive race after maintaining a decisive lead over Republican Kristie Bruce-Lane. She captured 53% of the vote, a seven-point margin, with Bruce-Lane trailing by nearly 14,000 votes. Despite the district's increasing Republican influence following a 2021 redistricting, Patel out-

Contd. on P14

Mehtab Sandhu Appointed Judge To OC Superior Court

India-West Staff Reporter

SACRAMENTO, CA – California Governor Gavin Newsom has appointed Mehtab Sandhu as a Judge in the Orange County Superior Court, part of a larger announcement on December 13 that included 11 Superior Court appointments across California.

Sandhu brings extensive legal experience to the bench. Since 2022, he has served as an Assistant City Attorney in the City of Anaheim City Attorney's Office, following a stint as a Community Prosecutor in the same office. From 2012 to 2021, Sandhu was a Deputy District Attorney in San Bernardino County, where he gained significant prosecutorial expertise. Earlier in his career, he was an associate at Bernstein, Litowitz, Berger & Grossman.

Sandhu earned his Juris Doctor from the University of San Diego School of

Contd. on P14 Mehtab Sandhu



Ustad Zakir Hussain Laid To Rest In CA

SAN FRANCISCO, CA – Renowned tabla maestro Ustad Zakir Hussain, who passed away at 73 on December 15, was laid to rest on December 19 at Fernwood Cemetery, Mill Valley.

Drummer Anandan Sivamani and other musicians paid a heartfelt musical tribute during the last rites. The Consul General of India in San Francisco, K. Srikanth Reddy, draped Zakir Hussain's mortal remains with the Indian national flag and shared Prime Minister Narendra Modi's condolence message.

Approximately 300 people, including family, friends, musicians, and members of the Indian diaspora, attended the ceremony.

The cause of death was confirmed as idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis, a chronic lung



Anandan Sivamani and musicians pay homage to the tabla maestro. (Photo: screengrab/DC News)

disease. Zakir Hussain had been receiving treatment in a San Francisco hospital's ICU for heart-related complications over the past two weeks.

Born on March 9, 1951, in Mumbai, Zakir Hussain was the son of tabla legend Ustad Alla Rakha. He demonstrated extraordinary talent from a young age, performing with India's greatest classical musicians as a teenager.

His illustrious career included collaborations with icons like Pandit Ravi Shankar and Ustad Vilayat Khan and founding fusion bands such as Shakti with guitarist John McLaughlin and Planet Drum with Mickey Hart of the Grateful Dead. His work on the Planet Drum album earned

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COMMENTARY

Growing Footprint: Indians 2nd Largest Group To Become US Citizens

India-West News Desk

WASHINGTON, DC – The allure of the United States continues to draw Indians in significant numbers, solidifying their place as one of the largest groups contributing to U.S. naturalizations.

In Fiscal Year 2024, over 50,000 Indians became U.S. citizens, making India the second-largest contributor to naturalizations after Mexico, which led with 13.1 percent. India accounted for 6.1 percent of all new U.S. citizens, followed by the Philippines (5.0 percent), the Dominican Republic (4.9 percent), and Vietnam (4.1 percent), according to the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

Employment Pathways

Many Indians secure permanent residency through employment-based preference categories, a key factor in their naturalization journey. The median time spent as a lawful permanent resident before naturalizing varies by nationality, and Indians, often pursuing advanced careers, exemplify this trend.



States

Several U.S. states and cities with significant Indian American populations emerged as key hubs for naturalizations in FY 2024. California, Texas, and New York led the states, while cities like Houston, Miami, and Los Angeles hosted large naturalization ceremonies.

Gender

Women accounted for 55 percent of all naturalized citizens this year, with over 37 percent of new citizens aged between 30 and 44. The median age of naturalized citizens was 42, with 17 percent under the age of 30. Many Indian families, including seniors seeking family reunification, have benefited from these pathways, contributing to the community's multigenerational presence.

Fee Waivers

Recognizing economic challenges, USCIS granted fee waivers to 14.3 percent of naturalized citizens in FY 2024. Older adults, including many Indian seniors, were among the key beneficiaries of this provision, ensuring broader accessibility to citizenship.

Diaspora Remits Billions Of Dollars Helping Indian Economy

India-West News Desk

India has once again emerged as the world's largest recipient of remittances, with a record-breaking \$129 billion flowing into the country in 2024, according to World Bank data. This significant figure highlights the crucial role of India's vast diaspora and its integral contribution to the nation's economic framework.

The importance of remittances in India's economy is underscored by the fact that this inflow far exceeded the country's Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), which stood at \$62 billion as of the September quarter and even surpassed India's defense budget by over \$55 billion.

To put it in perspective, India's remittances are nearly equivalent to the combined annual budgets of neighboring nations, Pakistan (\$67 billion) and Bangladesh (\$68 billion).



Growth

India has seen a staggering 57 percent growth in remittance inflows over the past decade, totaling \$982 billion between 2014 and

2024. From receiving \$70 billion in 2014, the country has steadily seen the numbers climb, crossing the \$100 billion mark in 2021, and now achieving this all-time high.

expatriate community in high-income countries, particularly in the United States.

The recovery of job markets, especially in the U.S., has been a

critical factor in the surge. Foreign-born workers in the U.S. saw employment levels rise by 11 percent above pre-pandemic figures, driving strong remittance flows back to India.

Impact on India's Economy

Remittances have become a lifeline for many Indian families, contributing to poverty alleviation, healthcare, education, and financial inclusion. These funds offer financial stability and security, especially during times of economic uncertainty. In fact, they continue to be a vital source of foreign exchange for India, outpacing even FDI in their significance.

"India's diaspora continues to be a cornerstone of the nation's economic resilience," remarked a World Bank economist, highlighting how crucial these remittances are to sustaining the country's growth and development.



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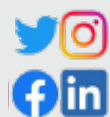
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COMMUNITY

Ekal Gala Raises \$3.5 Million To Empower Tribal, Rural India

India-West Staff Reporter

PALO ALTO, CA – The Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation of USA hosted a gala at the Four Seasons Hotel in Palo Alto, raising \$3.5 million to support the development of remote and rural villages in India. The event, themed “Building a Self-Reliant Rural and Tribal India,” featured influential speakers, including H.R. McMaster, the 25th U.S. National Security Advisor; Dr. Arun Majumdar, Dean of Stanford University’s Doerr School of Sustainability; and Bollywood star and philanthropist Vivek Oberoi.

The Bay Area chapter event, led by Ekal board member Mahesh Navani, on November 9 highlighted the challenges

faced by India’s rural and tribal communities. Subra Dravida, President of Ekal USA, shared that more than 100 million people in tribal areas have minimal access to resources, with 88,000 villages lacking healthcare and facing severe poverty and a digital divide. He emphasized Ekal’s mission to empower changemakers by bringing literacy, healthcare, and economic prosperity through over 80,000 one-teacher schools and Integrated Village Development (IVD) programs.

The keynote speakers commended Ekal’s impact. Majumdar praised the organization for its commitment to future generations, while McMaster emphasized the strength of the India-U.S. relationship. Oberoi described his support for Ekal as a “karmic investment,” urging others to join.

Generous pledges came from donors such as Radhi and Girish Navani, Dr. Kavita Navani, and Dr. Rajesh Dharampuriya, among others. Young entrepreneur Aakash



Prasad increased his pledge, while Bay Area donors Ken Bahl and Kamlesh Shah doubled their contributions. The event also featured

stories of Ekal’s impact, gourmet dining by chef Gaurav Anand, and entertainment by rapper Arun Sai-gal and beatboxer Vinith Johnson.



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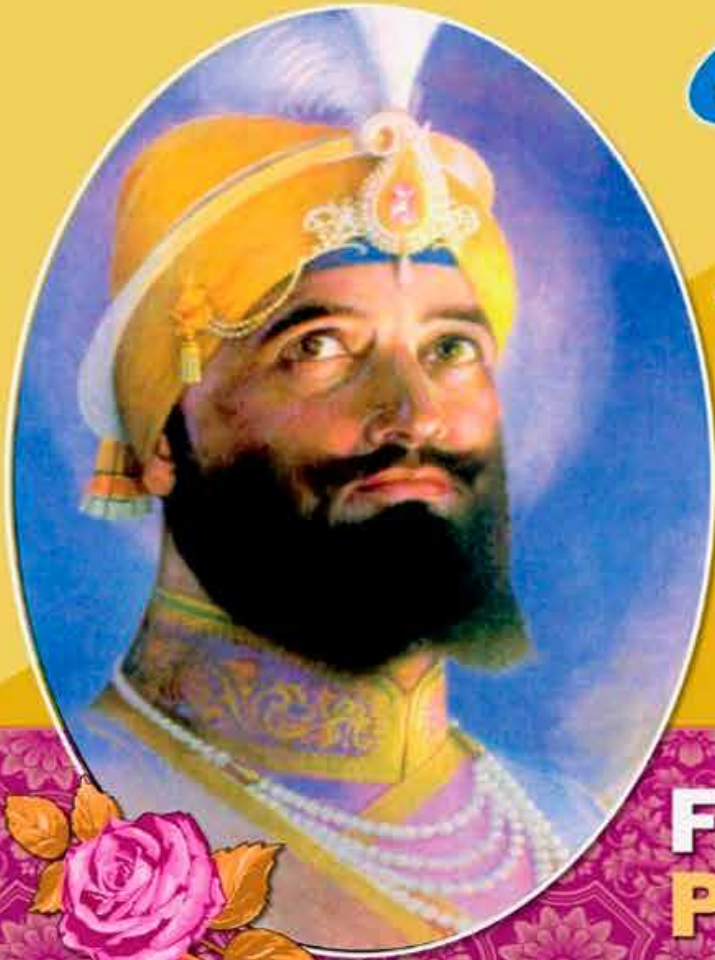
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COMMUNITY

Racist Outburst Against Indian American On Airlines Shuttle Sparks Outrage

India-West News Desk

LOS ANGELES, CA – A shocking incident of racial abuse unfolded on a United Airlines shuttle bus at Los Angeles International Airport, drawing widespread condemnation online. Wedding photographer Pervez Taufiq captured the exchange on video, documenting a confrontation between his Indian American family and a woman who hurled a barrage of racist insults.

The ordeal reportedly began mid-flight when the woman, seated near Taufiq's 11-year-old son, made inappropriate comments about his heritage. The situation escalated on the shuttle bus when she told the children to "shut up." Taufiq confronted her, prompting an even more hostile response.

In the video, the woman, dressed in a green striped shirt, raised both middle fingers and launched into a tirade: "Your family is from India, you have no respect, you have no rules... You guys are fg crazy." She went on to mock him, saying, "I'm going to record your fg tandoori a... your tandoori stinky a*."

When Taufiq asserted his American identity, she dismissed it,



insisting, "You're not American. Not originally, no, you're from... India." Taufiq countered calmly, saying, "I was born in America," but the woman retorted, "No, you weren't, that's not on your passport."

As the altercation unfolded, other passengers intervened, demanding the woman be removed from the shuttle. One passenger told a United Airlines employee, "She is out of line, she's drunk, and we need her off the bus." Another added, "She's been calling racist slurs at this nice family. They didn't do anything."

United Airlines staff escorted the woman off the shuttle, which Taufiq later acknowledged in his

Instagram post. "Blown away these types of people still exist," he wrote, thanking those who stood by his family during the incident.

Taufiq, a Boston native and an accomplished wedding photographer who travels globally with his wife, reflected on the incident in disbelief. "My blood is boiling right now," he said in the video. "We were just having an altercation with this lady who was giving us a really hard time telling the kids to 'shut up.' I lost it and said, you know, you don't have a right to talk to my kids like that."

The video, shared on Instagram, quickly went viral, drawing support for Taufiq and his family. Notable figures, including journalist Katie Couric, commented on the post, expressing solidarity.

California Student Crowned Miss India USA



event, making it the longest-running Indian pageant outside of India and is founded by New York-based Dharmatma and Neelam Saran under the Worldwide Pageants banner.

The event saw 47 contestants from 25 states competing in three categories.

The first and second runner-up titles in the Miss India USA category were awarded to Nirali Desia from Illinois and Manini Patel from New Jersey, re-

spectively. In addition to the Miss India USA competition, Sanskriti Sharma of Illinois was crowned Mrs. India USA, and Arshita Kathalia of Washington claimed the title of Miss Teen India USA.

In the teen category, Dhriti Patel of Rhode Island and Sonali Sharma also earned first and second runner-up honors. Sapna Mishra of Virginia and Chinmayee Ayachit of Connecticut were named first and second runner-up in the Mrs. India USA competition.

India-West News Desk

FORDS, NJ – Chennai-born 19-year-old Caitlin Sandra Neil, was crowned Miss India USA 2024 at the annual pageant held on December 15 in New Jersey. Neil is a second-year Cognitive Science student at the University of California, Davis, with a focus on computational science.

The pageant, held at Royal Albert's Palace in Fords, New Jersey, marked the 42nd edition of the prestigious



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The course will be offered **online** from **Monday January 13 through Sunday February 9, 2025**. Selected readings and videos and online class discussions will be available by login to MIU's online learning management system. The professor will hold weekly office hours on Wednesday evenings and a class webinar by Zoom on Sunday evenings. As a non-credit student, keeping up with the readings, videos and discussions will likely require an average of 1-2 hours per day, but the timing of participation is flexible, because the course is primarily asynchronous.

Required Texts

Doshi, Navin. 2021. *Saving Ourselves: A New Model for Individual and Social Transformation*.

Jayanti Press, an imprint of Maharishi International University Press.

Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. 1969/2015. *Maharishi Mahesh Yogi On the Bhagavad Gita: A New Translation and Commentary*. Baltimore: Penguin Books 1969; Fairfield IA: MIU Press, 2015.

About the Professor

Scott Herriott is the Chief Academic Officer of MIU, serving as its Vice-President for Academic Affairs and Professor of Management. He is a member of the Phi Beta Kappa academic honor society. He received his B.A. degree in mathematics summa cum laude from Dartmouth College and his Ph.D. in management science and engineering at Stanford University. He is the author of three books and a dozen scientific papers. He is active in the higher education community and has visited many universities in the United States as a member or chair of an accreditation evaluation team for the Higher Learning Commission, based in Chicago. He was personally trained as a teacher of Transcendental Meditation by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi more than 50 years ago.

How to Register

Please send an email directly to Professor Herriott (sherriott@miu.edu), and he will arrange for your registration through MIU's Enrollment Center.

The tuition fee for non-credit auditors is \$600.

College students may take this course for credit, earning 2 semester-hours of credit, at a tuition of \$1,200. A limited number of \$600 scholarships will be available for credit-earning students. High school seniors with good academic records may take this course for college credit by special request.

COMMUNITY

GOPIO-LA Addresses Critical Issue Of Diabetes At Formative Event

India-West Staff Reporter

ORANGE, CA – The GOPIO-LA Chapter hosted its annual event on November 16 at Tandoor Cuisine of India, bringing together over 120 attendees for an event on the critical issue of diabetes and resultant medical complications. Titled Uncontrolled Diabetes Complications and How to Reverse Them, the event featured expert discussions, a theatrical presentation, and interactive sessions highlighting the importance of managing diabetes through medical care and lifestyle changes.

The summit opened with a prayer by Dr. Sukrit Mukherjee and included a panel of experts: Dr. Asmath Noor (Periodontal Care Dentist), Dr. Arvind Mehta (Nephrologist), Dr. Hema Ramkumar (Retina Specialist), Dr. Anil Patil (Medical Digital Innovator), Dr. Rohini Joshi (Endocrinologist/Neurologist), Dr. Jay Amin (Weight Loss Specialist), Dr. Draupadi Talreja (Oncologist), and millet influencer Chhavi Chawla. The panelists emphasized that uncontrolled diabetes can lead to severe complications but that effective management, including dietary changes, can mitigate or even reverse the condition. A live millet khichdi demonstration by Yatri Shukla complemented this discussion.

Saahas for Cause, a nonprofit organi-



zation, presented a play titled A Sweet Concern, portraying the emotional and psychological challenges faced by diabetes patients and their families. The performance underscored the impact of the disease on family dynamics, reinforcing the summit's focus on the holistic challenges of diabetes.

The event also showcased a diabetes-friendly meal featuring millet, sparking discussions on its high fiber content and role in managing blood sugar levels. Attendees participated in an interactive Q&A session with the specialists, who highlighted the importance of awareness and proactive care

in reducing diabetes-related complications.

The summit was organized by GOPIO-LA President Charu Shivakumar, GOPIO-International Health and Wellness Co-Chair Aparna Hande, and GOPIO-International Women's Affairs Co-Chair Rani Kuusto, with support from GOPIO-International Vice President and Treasurer Kewal Kanda and North America Coordinator Ashok Madan.

GOPIO-International Global Ambassador and Presidential Candidate Prakash Shah commended the conveners for their efforts.

Cerritos Mayor Naresh Solanki and Artesia Mayor Pro Tem Ali Sajjad Taj presented proclamations to the organizers, while speakers and event managers were recognized with appreciation medals.

Attendees received goodie bags as tokens of appreciation, concluding a well-rounded and informative event.



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Deeply Loyal To Trump, Kash Patel Scores Nomination To Head FBI

WASHINGTON, DC (Reuters) – Republican President-elect Donald Trump said on Saturday he wanted former National Security official and loyalist Kash Patel to lead the FBI, signaling an intent to drive out the bureau's current director, Christopher Wray.

Patel, who during Trump's first term advised both the director of national intelligence and the secretary of defense, has previously called for stripping the FBI of its intelligence-gathering role and purging its ranks of any employee who refuses to support Trump's agenda.

"The biggest problem the FBI has had, has come out of its intel shops. I'd break that component out of it. I'd shut down

the FBI Hoover building on day one and reopen it the next day as a museum of the deep state," Patel said in a September interview on the conservative Shawn Ryan Show.

"And I'd take the 7,000 employees that work in that building and send them across America to chase down criminals. Go be cops. You're cops. Go be cops."

With the nomination of Patel, Trump is signaling that he is preparing to carry out his threat to oust Wray, a Republican first appointed by Trump, whose 10-year term at the FBI does not expire until 2027.

Asked about Patel's nomination, which will need Senate confirmation,



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an FBI spokesperson said on Saturday: "Every day, the men and women of the FBI continue to work to protect Americans from a growing array of threats. Director Wray's focus remains on the men and women of the FBI, the people we do the work with, and the people we do the work for."

FBI directors by law are appointed to 10-year terms as a means of insulating the bureau from politics.

Wray, whom Trump tapped after firing James Comey in 2017 for investigating his 2016 campaign, has been a frequent target of Trump supporters' ire.

During Wray's tenure, the FBI carried out a court-approved search at Trump's Mar-a-Lago estate to look for classified documents and he has also faced criticism for his oversight role of a directive by Attorney General Merrick Garland aimed at working to protect local school boards from violent threats and harassment.

Special Counsel Jack Smith, who led the two federal prosecutions against Trump for his role in subverting the 2020 election and retaining classified documents, asked on Nov. 25 the judges overseeing those cases to dismiss them before Trump takes office on Jan. 20, citing a Justice Department policy of not prosecuting a sitting president.

Wray had previously signaled no intention of stepping down early and was busy planning events well into his 2025 calendar, according to a person familiar with the matter.

Patel, 44, previously worked as a federal public defender and a federal prosecutor.

He was instrumental in working to lead House Republicans' probe into the FBI's 2016 investigation into contacts between Trump's 2016 campaign and Russia during his stint as an aide to former House Intelligence Committee Chair Devin Nunes.

Later, during Trump's first impeachment trial, ex-National Security Council official Fiona Hill told House investigators she was concerned Patel was secretly serving as a back channel between Trump and Ukraine without authorization.

Patel denied those allegations.

After Trump left office in January 2021, Patel was one of several people Trump designated as a representative for access to his presidential records. He was one of the few former Trump administration officials who claimed, without evidence, that Trump had declassified all of the records in question.

As a private citizen, Patel wrote a book called "Government Gangsters" which Trump in 2023 declared would be used as a "roadmap to end the Deep State's Reign."

Patel's nomination is likely to garner pushback from Senate Democrats and possibly even some Republicans, though Patel has received public support from some high-profile Republicans such as Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton.

City Of Los Angeles Recognizes Diwali With Historic Proclamation



India-West Staff Reporter

LOS ANGELES, CA – In a historic moment of cultural recognition, the City of Los Angeles hosted a presentation and issued a proclamation in honor of Diwali, the festival of lights.

The event, led by council members Nithya Raman and John Lee, celebrated Diwali's powerful message of light triumphing over darkness and good over evil, a sentiment that resonates with Angelenos of all backgrounds.

"Diwali is a vibrant festival, symbolizing the victory of light over darkness, and good over evil," councilmember Raman said in her address, emphasizing the universal significance of the celebration.

Councilmember Lee echoed this sentiment, adding, "As we light our diyas today, let us remember that we have the power to bring light into the lives of others."

The ceremony featured a traditional invocation by Pundit Balmiki Sharma, who chanted Rigvedic mantras, bringing an authentic touch of cultural heritage to the event.

Sunil Agrawal, President of the India Association of Los Angeles (IALA), expressed gratitude on behalf of the Indian American community, thanking Councilmembers Raman and Lee for their support. "By adopting

this resolution, the City of Los Angeles has not only acknowledged the significance of Diwali, but it has also reaffirmed its commitment to embracing cultural diversity as a source of strength," Agrawal said. "This recognition is a powerful reminder that when we celebrate our differences, we build a stronger, more united community. It is through understanding and celebrating the cultural traditions of others that we foster compassion, respect, and inclusivity."

Agrawal also marked the occasion by presenting each councilmember with a box of traditional Diwali sweets and a small memento, symbolizing goodwill and the spirit of sharing that Diwali embodies.

Community leaders in attendance included Raman Chadha, Manmohan Chopra, and Pramesh Shah from IALA; Naren Jhala from Valley Hindu Temple; Latesh Bhamhani from the Art of Living; and Ganesh Narayanaswami from Isha Foundation. These representatives joined the celebration, highlighting the contributions of the broader Indian American community to Los Angeles' rich cultural fabric.

This event marks the first Diwali recognition in the history of the Los Angeles City Council, a significant milestone in the city's ongoing efforts to embrace and celebrate cultural diversity, Agrawal noted.

Vance's Photo With Wife Usha's Family Goes Viral



Photo: x.com/@ashajadeja325

India-West News Desk

WASHINGTON, DC – A candid photo of Vice President-elect JD Vance celebrating Thanksgiving with his wife Usha Vance's extended Indian family has taken social media by storm. The image, shared by California venture capitalist Asha Jadeja Motwani, shows Vance dressed casually in a blue T-shirt and jeans, holding his son on his shoulders. Usha, in a mustard-yellow outfit, stands to his left with their daughter in her arms. The couple is surrounded by 21 family members in what appears to be a festive backyard gathering.

Captioning the image, Motwani wrote, "JD Vance at Thanksgiving. Reminds me of the big fat Indian wedding," alluding to the

lively and close-knit vibe of Indian family celebrations.

The post drew widespread attention, with many applauding Vance's embrace of his wife's cultural roots. Social media users celebrated his involvement with the family. "JD understands what a real family looks like," one commenter wrote.

However, the photo also attracted criticism from far-right commentators. Nick Fuentes, a controversial figure known for his inflammatory rhetoric, took to social media to mock the image, writing, "If you support JD Vance, you're either being paid by Peter Thiel or you're ngmi [not going to make it]."

Usha Vance has faced virulent stereotyping since her husband was nominated to the Republican ticket.

सेरिटोस शहर, पब्लिक ऑफिस के लिए प्रत्याशियों का नोटिस

इसके द्वारा नोटिस दिया गया है कि निम्न व्यक्तियों को मंगलवार, 4 मार्च 2025 को सिटी ऑफ़ सेरिटोस में होने वाले जनरल म्युनिसिपल इलेक्शन में भरे जाने वाले नियुक्त कार्यालयों के लिए नामांकित किया गया है। मेंबर ऑफ़ द सिटी काउंसिल के लिए तीन से अधिक वोट न दें (3)

Adrian Ayub
Jennifer Hong
Hao (Ricky) Huynh
Esther Hwang
Riaz Surti
Mark E. Pulido
Rocky Pavone
(Pat) Ashok Patnaik
"JC" Jignesh Chokshi
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Tulsi Gabbard Visits BAPS, Highlights Hindu Heritage

India-West Staff Reporter

ROBBINSVILLE, NJ – Tulsi Gabbard, the first Hindu elected to the U.S. Congress and President-elect Donald Trump’s incoming Director of National Intelligence, addressed over 1,000 devotees at the BAPS Swaminarayan Akshardham here, on December 15. Her visit marked a significant moment for the Hindu-American community.

Speaking at a cultural program held at the iconic temple, Tulsi Gabbard expressed her admiration for its intricate craftsmanship and profound spiritual symbolism. “To see the countless hands and hearts that contributed to building this magnificent temple and to walk through its halls, observing sculptures depicting Krishna, Arjuna, and the timeless lessons of the Bhagavad Gita, was deeply inspiring,” she said.

The BAPS organization praised

Gabbard’s acknowledgment of shared cultural and spiritual values. In a statement they noted, “As the first Hindu elected to Congress and

Born in American Samoa and raised in Hawaii, Gabbard’s connection to Hinduism stems from her mother, Carol Porter Gabbard, who em-

braced the Gaudiya Vaishnav tradition in the 1970s. Though often mistaken for being of Indian descent due to her name and faith, Gabbard has consistently shared how Hindu teachings have guided her public service ethos.

Tulsi Gabbard is a lieutenant colonel in the Army Reserve with combat experience in Iraq. She made headlines during her time in Congress for taking her oath of office on the Bhagavad

the incoming Director of National Intelligence, her reflections on how our shared heritage shaped her life of public service resonated deeply.”

During her speech, Tulsi Gabbard reflected on her spiritual journey and its role in shaping her career.

Gita, symbolizing her commitment to spiritual and moral principles. Known for her independent approach to foreign policy, Gabbard has been both praised and criticized for challenging Washington’s conventional views.



Assembly Member



to pursue a career in medical research. Patel earned a B.A. in Biochemistry from Occidental College and a Ph.D. in Biophysics from UC Irvine before launching a successful career in biotechnology. Transition-

Contd. from P1

ing to community leadership, she served as School Board President for the Poway Unified School District and held roles on the California Commission on Asian and Pacific Islander American Affairs, advocating for inclusivity and opportunity.

The campaign, marked by contentious exchanges, saw Bruce-Lane criticize Patel’s leadership on the Poway Unified School Board and accuse her of aligning with “radical” ideologies. Patel countered by highlighting Bruce-Lane’s controversial stances on abortion and gun control and her past lawsuits against families. Ultimately, Patel’s focus on community issues and her leadership record resonated with voters. Patel’s personal journey is one of resilience and achievement. The daughter of Indian immigrants, she faced the loss of her mother at age 14—a tragedy that inspired her

ing to community leadership, she served as School Board President for the Poway Unified School District and held roles on the California Commission on Asian and Pacific Islander American Affairs, advocating for inclusivity and opportunity.

In the Assembly, Patel plans to prioritize public safety, reproductive freedom, enhanced education funding, expanded healthcare access, and solutions to homelessness. “As a mother and community leader, I am committed to making our communities safer, stronger, and more affordable for future generations,” she said. Patel’s election marks a significant victory for Democrats in a district once considered a Republican stronghold.

Mehtab Sandhu

Contd. from P1

Law and is a member of the Democratic Party. He fills the vacancy left by the retirement of Judge Steven Bromberg. This appointment highlights Governor Newsom’s efforts to diversify the judiciary and reinforce California’s legal system, with each judge earning a compensation of \$244,727. Other appointees announced include Amber Poston in Orange County and María G. Díaz in Fresno County, among others.



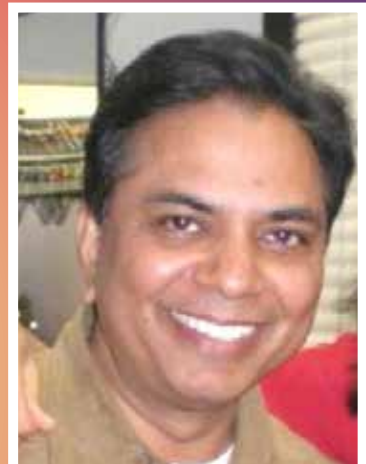
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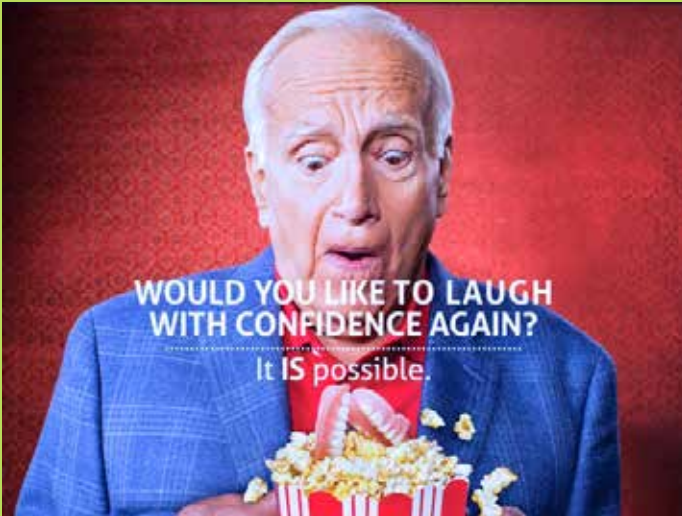
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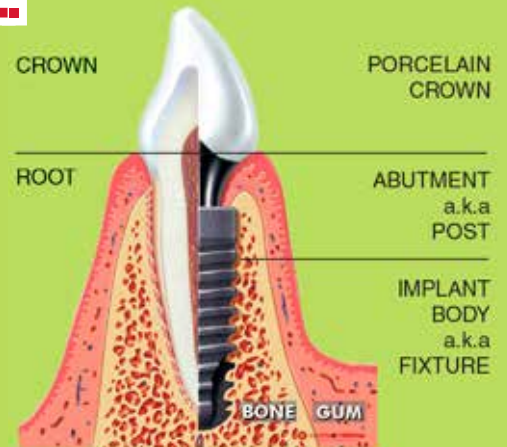
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CA's Harmeet Dhillon Nominated To Civil Rights Job



Harmeet Dhillon

WASHINGTON DC (ANI) - Donald Trump has nominated Indian-origin Harmeet Dhillon as Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights at the US Department of Justice.

Dhillon thanked Trump in a statement and said that she would assist with US's civil rights agenda.

In a statement, Trump said, "Throughout her career, Harmeet has stood up consistently to protect our cherished Civil Liberties, including taking on Big Tech for censoring our Free Speech, representing Christians who were prevented from praying together during COVID, and suing corporations who use woke policies to discriminate against their workers. Harmeet is one of the top Election lawyers in the Country, fighting to ensure that all, and ONLY, legal votes are counted. She is a graduate

of Dartmouth College and the University of Virginia Law School, and clerked in the US Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals. Harmeet is a respected member of the Sikh religious community. In her new role at the DOJ, Harmeet will be a tireless defender of our Constitutional Rights, and will enforce our Civil Rights and Election Laws FAIRLY and FIRMLY. Congratulations, Harmeet!"

To this, Dhillon said, "I'm extremely honored by President Trump's nomination to assist with our nation's civil rights agenda. It has been my dream to be able to serve our great country, and I am so excited to be part of an incredible team of lawyers led by Pam Bondi. I cannot wait to get to work! I would not be here today without my amazing mother and brother's support, and my beloved father Tejpal and husband Sarv, who did not live to see this day. I hope I will honor their memories, with God's grace."

Rep. Thanedar Condemns Trump Proposal To End Birthright Citizenship



Congressman Shri Thanedar

India-West News Desk

DETROIT, MI – Congressman Shri Thanedar has strongly criticized President-elect Donald Trump's plan to abolish birthright citizenship, calling it a direct attack on a cornerstone of American democracy. Thanedar, a firm advocate of the 14th Amendment, voiced his opposition on social media, pledging to fight against any effort to undermine this constitutional right.

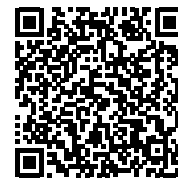
"Birthright citizenship is a right every American enjoys. Donald Trump's threats to this fundamental concept, enshrined in the 14th Amendment, are antithetical to the rule of law. I will fight tooth and nail to prevent him from deporting American citizens," the Democrat posted on social media.

The 14th Amendment, in effect for over 150 years, grants citizenship to anyone born on U.S. soil. Trump has repeatedly criticized this provision, calling it a "ridiculous" concept that encourages illegal immigration. During his first term, he floated the idea of eliminating birthright citizenship through an executive order, a proposal that took a backseat during the pandemic but has resurfaced as a key promise for his second term.

Thanedar emphasized the constitutional protection birthright citizenship provides, stating, "If a person is born in America, then they are an American citizen. Efforts to ban or circumvent birthright citizenship are wrong and unconstitutional. As a congressman, I'll fight back against any attempt to roll it back."

The Migration Policy Institute notes that children born to Indian nationals on H-1B visas or green cards could face uncertainty about their citizenship status if Trump's plan were implemented.

UNITE AGAINST SOUTH ASIAN HATE



TO REPORT HATE
Dial 211 or go to LAvsHate.org

Hate crimes and incidents against South Asians have increased in light of the 2024 election. Resources are available through community-based support from the Los Angeles County initiative 211LA in partnership with the South Asian Network. Assistance is offered in multiple languages, including Bangla, Gujarati, Hindi, Nepali, Pashto, Punjabi, and Urdu.



OBITUARY

Kabir Singh: Comedian Who Spread Laughter Across Borders, Dead At 39



India-West News Desk

LOS ANGELES, CA – Kabir Singh, the comedian who rose to prominence as a semi-finalist on America's Got Talent Season 16, passed away on December 4 at the age of 39. Known affectionately as "Kabeezy," Singh captured audiences with his sharp wit and relatable humor, leaving a lasting impression on the entertainment world.

Born in Portland, Oregon, to Indian immigrant parents, Singh's early life was marked by cultural duality that later became a cornerstone of his comedy. He spent part of his childhood in Mumbai before returning to the U.S., where his experiences inspired much of his material.

Singh began his stand-up journey in local clubs, steadily building a reputation as a sharp, engaging performer. His humor eventually earned him a spot on Comedy Central's Stand-Up Revolution, and his comedic voice was featured on iconic platforms like Family Guy and the BBC.

In 2021, Singh gained national attention with his performances on America's Got Talent. He charmed judges Simon Cowell, Howie Mandel, Heidi Klum, and Sofia Vergara, making it to the semi-finals.

Law enforcement sources have indicated that his death in the San Francisco Bay Area may have been due to natural causes, though toxicology results are pending.

Singh is survived by his fiancée and his family.

Sending Shockwaves, Indian Yoga Guru Dies Suddenly In Virginia

India-West News Desk

CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA – Sharath Jois, a star in the yoga community and grandson of iconic yoga guru K. Pattabhi Jois, tragically passed away here, at the age of 53. His sudden death has sent shockwaves through his tight-knit community of yoga practitioners and celebrities alike. Jois, renowned for teaching Ashtanga yoga to A-list stars such as Madonna, Gwyneth Paltrow, and Sting, died on November 11 after suffering a heart attack while hiking near the University of Virginia.

At the time of his passing, Jois was on a teaching tour across the U.S. and had just posted a video of his class on Instagram. Jois had been scheduled to teach in San Antonio, next. He was reportedly hiking with around 50 students at Humpback Rocks when he became fatigued and collapsed. Despite efforts from students to revive him with CPR, he was declared dead upon the arrival of emergency responders.

Sharath Jois was not only the heir to the Ashtanga yoga tradition but also a transformative figure in the yoga world. Under his leader-



ship, the K. Pattabhi Jois Ashtanga Yoga Institute in Mysore, became a globally recognized institution. Jois succeeded his grandfather as the director of the Institute in 2007, after K. Pattabhi Jois' health declined. In addition to running the Mysore center, Sharath later established the Sharath Yoga Center, where he continued his legacy of teaching and nurturing the next generation of yoga practitioners.

His personal journey with yoga was deeply transformative; as a sickly child who suffered from rheumatic fever, and joint issues, he believed yoga had healed him

and could help others too. He was a staunch advocate of the health benefits of Ashtanga yoga, especially for those suffering from respiratory issues, allergies, or the effects of pollution. Known for his rigorous approach to Ashtanga yoga, Jois, media reports said, was a vocal critic of short-term Teacher Training

Certificates and believed that one could only become a competent yoga teacher after several years of dedicated practice.

Jois' contributions to the global spread of Ashtanga yoga, particularly his workshops and classes attended by thousands of practitioners, cannot be overstated. His family and his students, including prominent figures like Paltrow, who credited him for her decision to give up alcohol and caffeine, remember him as a teacher whose impact extended beyond physical postures to the spiritual integration of the practice.

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OBITUARY

OpenAI Whistleblower Suchir Balaji Found Dead In SF

India-West News Desk

SAN FRANCISCO, CA – Suchir Balaji the 26-year-old former OpenAI researcher who publicly raised concerns about the company’s data practices, was found dead in his apartment here. Authorities determined his death was a suicide, with the medical examiner’s office ruling out foul play.

Balaji’s death in the last week of November has sent shockwaves through the tech community, where he was known not only for his technical brilliance but also for his recent whistleblowing efforts against OpenAI, one of the world’s leading artificial intelligence firms.

Early Life and Career

Balaji, an Indian American, grew up in Cupertino, CA. A prodigy, after studying computer science at the University of California, Berkeley, Balaji worked with companies like Scale AI and Quora before joining OpenAI in 2020. He contributed to the development of ChatGPT, helping collect and organize massive amounts of internet data used to train



Suchir Balaji

the chatbot.

Whistleblower Allegations

In October, Balaji made headlines after speaking to the New York Times about OpenAI’s use of copyrighted data in training its mod-

els. He alleged that the company had violated U.S. copyright laws and claimed that generative AI technologies like ChatGPT were damaging the internet.

He left OpenAI in August 2024, stating he no longer wanted to contribute to technologies that he believed were causing societal harm. Balaji spent his remaining months working on personal projects. His death occurred one day after he was named in a court filing connected to lawsuits against OpenAI over its data practices.–



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Ustad Zakir Hussain



Zakir Hussain's family.

Contd. from P1
him a Grammy Award.

Honored with the Padma Shri (1988) and Padma Bhushan (2002), Zakir Hussain also won four Grammy Awards and left an indelible mark on global music. He is survived by his wife, Antonia Minnecola, and daughters,

Anisa and Isabella Qureshi.

“He leaves behind an extraordinary legacy cherished by countless music lovers around the globe, with an influence that will resonate for generations to come,” his family said in a statement.

(with news agencies input)

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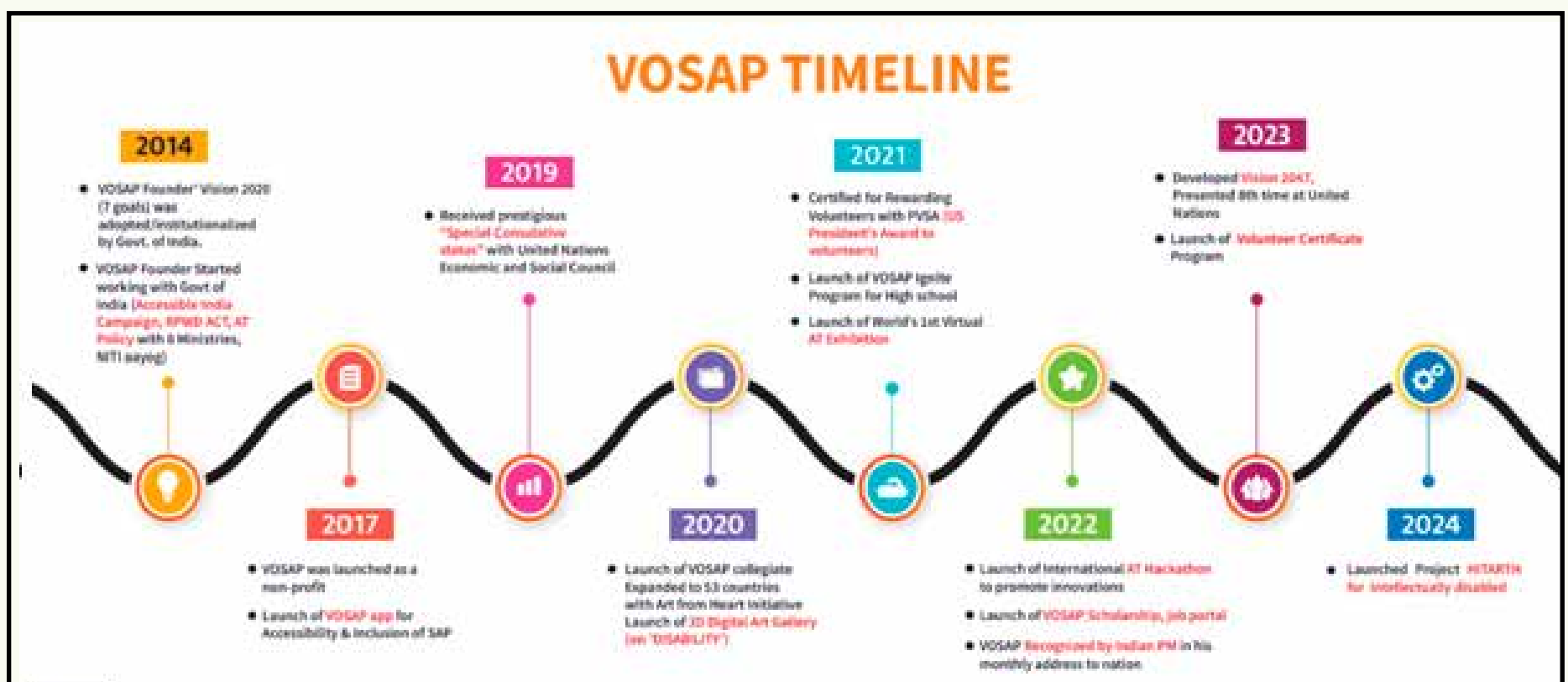
Sarva Mangal Family Trust / Shah Happiness Foundation

Transforming Lives and Shaping a More Inclusive India: VOSAP's journey

Voice of SAP (VOSAP), co-founded with Usha Desai by Pranav Desai—a polio survivor turned global advocate for disability rights has grown into a transformative force with over 12,000 volunteers, over 2,000 NRI donors for inclusion and empowerment in India. Started as a personal passion in 2014, subsequently established as a non-profit in 2017 in CA, VOSAP combines compassion with use of cutting-edge technologies to create more opportunities, economic inclusion for millions of people with disabilities (Divyangjan). With a bold vision to contribute \$1 trillion to India's GDP by 2047 from the disability sector, VOSAP has been working as a catalyst of

change with its Advocacy and Execution of programs for making India a "Viksit Bharat by 2047". VOSAP advocacy focuses on awareness about "ABILITY", "untapped" opportunities for people with disabilities and has collaborated with the Indian government on policy recommendations to harness. VOSAP has invested in digital tools like VOSAP mobile app for accessibility, 3D Assistive Technology Exhibition, a virtual art gallery on the theme of 'Disability', while amplifying amazing stories of individuals with disabilities through its portal.

Over the last decade, VOSAP has impacted thousands of lives by addressing critical gaps in healthcare, education, employment, and public accessibility. This article explores how VOSAP is redefining inclusion through groundbreaking initiatives like project HITARTH, assistive technology innovations and adoption, data driven advocacy that has inspired individuals of all ages and policymakers alike to take action.



Delivering Transformative Change

VOSAP has been instrumental in changing the lives of thousands of people with disabilities through its diverse initiatives. From providing innovative assistive devices to manage physical limitations to empowering individuals with self-employment kits and scholarships, VOSAP's work has fueled economic empowerment and independence. Surgical interventions, such as eye surgeries, have restored vision and transformed lives, while innovative models like HITARTH has accelerated healthcare access for intellectually disabled individuals.

With a bold vision to contribute \$1 trillion to India's GDP by 2047 from the disability sector, harnessing the ABILITY of Specially Aabled People, VOSAP has showcased with its own data of beneficiaries over past 7 years as how empowering Divyangjan can significantly contribute to the nation's economic growth. Through these initiatives, VOSAP has directly impacted over 30,000 Divyangjan, demonstrating the power of collective action in transforming lives and building an inclusive society.

Sarva Mangal Family Trust / Shah Happiness Foundation

VOICE OF SPECIALLY ABLED PEOPLE

Vision 2047 for Divyangjan

\$1 Trillion (~3% Bharat's GDP) Economic Contribution
with comprehensive tax incentives and other policy measures

The infographic features a central globe with India highlighted in red, a person in a wheelchair, and a rising bar chart with an upward arrow. Surrounding the globe are several photographs showing people in various settings, including meetings, presentations, and social interactions.

Leveraging Technology to Scale Impact

VOSAP has embraced cutting-edge technologies as a cornerstone of its operations, enabling it to extend its reach to 50+ countries and transform lives across India and beyond. Beneficiaries from 24 states in India have received life-changing support, demonstrating the organization's ability to scale its impact nationwide. Globally, initiatives like the "Art from Heart" contest in 2020 showcased the universal relevance of disability inclusion. This online art competition attracted 4,200 participants from 53 countries, with nine international judges (from the USA, UK, and India) evaluating entries on VOSAP online platform!

VOSAP's innovative use of technology tools such as Salesforce to manage thousands of beneficiaries' data, follow ups, Call centre application Simple2Call for tracking beneficiaries, VOSAP mobile app for crowdsourcing and advocacy of accessibility of public places, the 3D exhibition platform (vFairs) to promote 35 Assistive Tech innovators – globally, that has fuelled economic growth for India's AT industry as well. You can visit and learn more about these products at events.voiceofsap.org

VOSAP DIGITAL TOOLS

This infographic displays various digital tools used by VOSAP, each with a small image and a link:

- AT Exhibition: events.voiceofsap.org
- Digital Art Gallery: voiceofsap.org/artgallery
- Web Portal: voiceofsap.org
- HITARTH Portal: hitarth.vosap.org
- Scalefusion: MDM Software
- Simple2Call: Call Center Software
- Salesforce: CRM Software
- VOSAP Mobile APP

VOSAP Supported AT Products
Promoting adoption of innovative assistive devices at affordable rates

The infographic is divided into three columns based on user needs:

- For Visually Impaired:** KIBO XS Device, KIBO APP, Nobaflix app, Jyoti AI Smart Glass, Smartphone, Smart Wallet, Smart Glasses, Orbit Reader.
- For Locomotive:** Commode Wheelchair, Standing Wheelchair, Neofly, CP Walker, Flexmo Crutch, Traditional Tricycle, 3D Prosthetic, Mouseware, Handicare, Self Operated Bed Recliner, Mobula, VGO Wheelchair attachment.
- For Hearing Impaired:** Hearing Aid, Signable App, Beauty Parlour Kit, Sewing Machine.

Over 25 such software applications, tools facilitate advocacy, data collection, engagement, operations and efficiency to scale at a very low cost. Technology has also empowered innovators to showcase their prototypes with VOSAP AT Hackathon platform, nurture a global community of 12,500 volunteers, Artists with disabilities to reach people around the world, find economic opportunities with their ABILITY in art with 3D online Art Gallery at www.voiceofsap.org/artgallery

With VOSAP program of Enablement, over 30 innovative assistive devices are subsidized today. This not only helps users of these devices but also helps scale the AT industry as it is early-stage industry and India can eventually supply to entire world, these affordable, patented Assistive devices to empower hundreds of millions of Specially Aabled People.

For example, Smart Glasses from Isreal has a market cap over \$1 B, just one product but very costly (over \$3000) while 2 companies supported financially by VOSAP subsidy for providing AI driven Smart Glasses are empowering thousands of lives and they cost less than \$200. Here are some of the assistive products and visit us online to see their impact, watch amazing videos of beneficiaries.

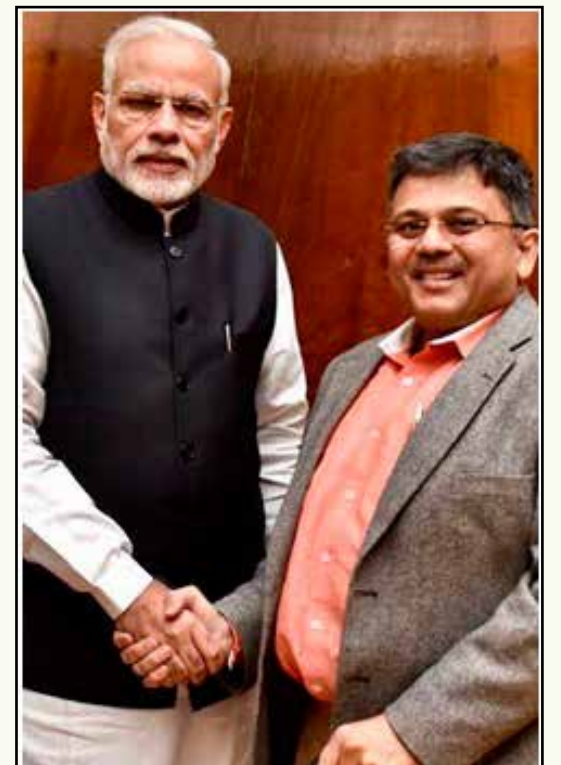
Driving Policy Change for Millions Through Advocacy

VOSAP's biggest impact, touching millions of people extends beyond direct beneficiaries, by shaping government policies. Collaborating with the Government of India, VOSAP's data-driven advocacy has been instrumental in driving change on the ground. It started with Accessible India Campaign that VOSAP founders conceived, presented to Govt of India, which was launched by Hon PM on Dec 3 2015. This alone has been changing physical infrastructure everywhere with new code, rules and has made India far more accessible in past 9 years.

Recently launched project HITARTH is making healthcare accessible under government scheme "Niramaya" for intellectually disabled. HITARTH project of VOSAP has emerged as an innovative model to accelerate the implementation of government program in a partnership to reach the last mile on the ground. Niramaya health insurance scheme is expected to transform millions of lives.

HITARTH – Healthcare Initiative To Avail Rehabilitative Therapies and Health coverage, in HINDI language, it is WELL WISHER, is an innovative initiative by VOSAP. VOSAP will pay to social workers called HITARTH SAHAYAK to help families of Intellectually disabled get NIRAMAYA card, apply expense reimbursement to Oriental insurance, connect with the health care providers locally and submit data to HITARTH portal to get paid! VOSAP expects each HITARHT Sahayak to help around 100 such families in their town and this will create huge knowledge, best practices among these 100 social workers to do what is needed to work with insurance company and help their beneficiaries. Niramaya Health Insurance Scheme provides comprehensive medical support upto Rs 1 lac per year. It covers physio and speech therapies, dental work and other non-hospital medical expenses, making healthcare accessible and free for all.

In ongoing efforts to drive policy driven impact, in Jan 2024, VOSAP founder met with Honourable Minister of Finance, Govt of India, Smt Sitharaman ji and presented Vision 2047 and \$1 trillion economic contribution vision.



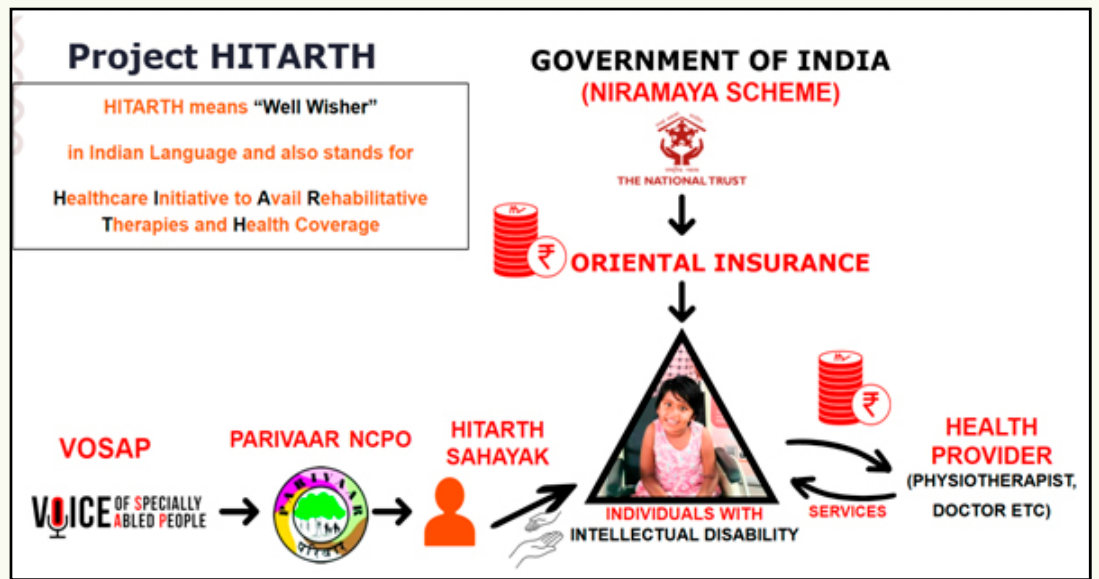
Sarva Mangal Family Trust / Shah Happiness Foundation

VOSAP's Journey

He presented a plan, comprehensive tax incentives to create the demand, jump start economic activities in the disability sector and create millions of new jobs for tax revenue instead spending on welfare, challenging the traditional way to look at disability sector and paving way for tapping into completely new stream of tax revenue from the disability sector.

On the international stage, VOSAP's advocacy has resonated with US congress persons through its proposal of "ADA 2.0". This vision aims to enhance economic independence and empowerment for people with disabilities, taking inspiration from the Americans with Disabilities Act and enhancing it with lesson learnt, data available and technology driven opportunities available today.

Likewise, as a youngest non-profit with a Special Consultative Status with United Nations Economic and Social Council since 2019, VOSAP has been chosen to present its thought leadership to global leaders to "THINK DIFFERENTLY", for 8 times in last 6 years.



Inspiring NRIs to Give Back

VOSAP's mission has inspired over 2,000 donors, primarily from the Non-Resident Indian (NRI) community of the US, to contribute to their motherland. Chief Patrons Rika and Manu Shah's of Sarva Mangal Family trust/Shah Happiness Foundation unwavering support exemplify the spirit of giving that VOSAP fosters. VOSAP has received not only financial support, but also much needed mentorship to VOSAP founders to "THINK BIG and BE BOLD" as they support over 700 charities and their experience as successful self-made billionaires is invaluable for the success of VOSAP mission. This has inspired many other donors in the process to donate whole heartedly. Tarsadia Foundation (Shri B.U. Patel) is another such supporter of VOSAP Vision and together with such donors, VOSAP aims to grow its impact exponentially in years to come.



By providing structured opportunities for NRIs to contribute for the outcomes they intent —whether through volunteering, donating, or supporting assistive devices innovations, VOSAP has created a robust network of compassionate individuals committed to Empower Specially Aabled People.

VOSAP has inspired change-makers like Sparsh Shah who has millions of fans following, himself is a Specially Aabled Person and he found purpose to amplify VOSAP mission as a brand ambassador! He has not only presented at United Nations but also every year, VOSAP annual event is hosted by him, he is physically there to inspire people to donate for VOSAP with his soulful singing. VOSAP raised over \$1 million in Sep fundraiser in Los Angeles where Sparsh Shah made a huge impact on donor community.

Over 2000+ Donors

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Neela Desai	Rohit Shah	Piyush Desai	B. U Patel
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Sarva Mangal Family Trust / Shah Happiness Foundation

VOSAP's Journey

Developing Leaders of Tomorrow

The transformative power of VOSAP's work is evident in the lives of over 300 young volunteers, including high schoolers and college interns. These brightminds spread across 20 colleges, have engaged in research in disability to strengthen data driven advocacy, volunteering, and even fundraising. VOSAP's structured volunteering programs have nurtured these young individuals into change leaders, inspiring them to take the mission of inclusion to heart. For example, one volunteer who began volunteering with VOSAP in the 12th grade has grown into a self-made millionaire, exemplifying the transformative potential of early engagement in impactful work. He recently made a generous donation of \$50,000 to support the cause of VOSAP which he is believing since 2017. Notably, 25 high school volunteers have received prestigious PVSA medals and recognition from the President of the United States for dedicating over 100 volunteer hours to VOSAP's initiatives.



A Decade of Recognition and Impact

In its 10-year journey, VOSAP has directly benefited over 30,000 Divyangjan, inspiring hope and empowerment. The organization's efforts have been recognized on the global stage, with a Special Consultative Status at the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), accreditation with UN CRPD (Convention of Rights of Persons with Disabilities) and public recognition of its tech driven impact by none other than Honourable Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi in his monthly radio address to nation called "Mann Ki Baat" in April 2022 in addition to several others.

Join the Movement

VOSAP's journey began with a dream to make India as inclusive and accessible as the United States. Today, it stands as a testament to the power of collective effort and innovation. Whether you wish to support structured volunteering for your children, do research as intern, help someone with a disability in your hometown or home district or school and contribute to a transformative cause or advocate with your local law makers, elected representative, VOSAP offers a unique platform to make a meaningful impact.

With technology as its backbone and compassion as its driving force, VOSAP continues to transform lives and inspire a global movement for disability inclusion. Join VOSAP in this mission and be a part of the opportunity to do what you can with your community, employer and find purpose, satisfaction for life by creating a more empowered society, lives of Specially Aabled People.

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Sabyasachi Launches In NY's Bergdorf Goodman

India-West News Desk

NEW YORK, NY – Renowned Indian luxury brand Sabyasachi is currently being featured at New York City's iconic Bergdorf Goodman, where the designer's full collection is on display until February 3, 2025. This exclusive showcase offers U.S. customers a rare opportunity to experience the artistry of Sabyasachi Mukherjee's India-inspired creations.

The Autumn/Winter 2024 collection draws inspiration from diverse global influences, ranging from the cultural richness of Benares to the nomadic allure of Mongolia. Combining haute couture with contemporary

elements, the collection showcases classical menswear tailoring, intricate handcrafted embroidery, and an enduring heirloom quality that exudes both elegance and modernity.

Sabyasachi's offerings—spanning ready-to-wear apparel, accessories, and jewelry—are presented in a carefully curated ambiance that reflects the brand's signature opulence. Calling the launch “a privilege,” Mukherjee noted, “This presentation marks a special moment where the best of India meets New York's finest emporium.”

Linda Fargo, Bergdorf Goodman's director of women's fashion and store presentation, praised the collaboration, stating, “The world of Sabyasachi is immersive and

distinct, offering a rare glimpse into the creative mind of a true original. We share a passion for opulent sophistication and unparalleled craftsmanship, and we're excited to offer our customers the full scope of Mukherjee's vision.”

This showcase builds on a partnership between Sabyasachi and Bergdorf Goodman

established in 2020, part of the Neiman Marcus Group's strategy to redefine luxury experiences. Since its founding in 2002, Sabyasachi has collaborated with global brands like Estée Lauder and Christian Louboutin, earning a reputation for creating modern heirlooms that celebrate India's cultural heritage.

Sky Bird's Arvin Shah Gets Lifetime Business Achievement Award

India-West Staff Reporter

SOUTHFIELD, MI – Arvin Shah, founder and chairman of Sky Bird Group, was recognized

the airline consolidation sector, providing travel agencies with competitive fares and reliable services. His work has influenced industry standards and supported the growth of businesses reliant on Sky Bird's offerings.



Consul General of India Somnath Ghosh, Arvin Shah, Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer, and Dhaval Vaishnav, NAICC President.

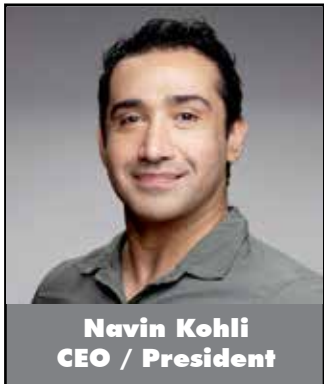
with the Lifetime Business Achievement Award by the North American Indian Chamber of Commerce on November 9. The honor acknowledges Shah's four decades of contributions to the travel industry and his leadership in establishing Sky Bird as a leading airline consolidator serving travel agents nationwide.

Under Shah's leadership, Sky Bird Group has played a pivotal role in

Beyond his business achievements, Shah has prioritized community service and philanthropy. In 2004, he and his family founded the Jaya Rehabilitation Institute to assist victims of the 2001 Kutch Earthquake, offering prosthetic treatments. The Shahs also established the Jaya Charitable Foundation, a Detroit-based nonprofit focused on initiatives that promote empowerment and opportunity.

Sky Bird Group, established over 40 years ago, provides travel agents with a range of services, including competitive fares, travel technology, student travel solutions, and specialized offerings like destination weddings and tours.

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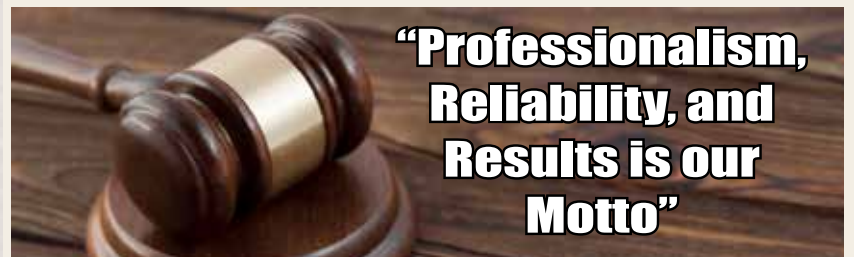
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Nargis Fakhri's Sister Arrested For Double Murder In New York

India-West News Desk

NEW YORK, NY – Aliya Fakhri, sister of Rockstar-fame actor Nargis Fakhri, has been charged with four counts of first-degree murder and arson in connection with a deadly fire in Queens. The November 2 blaze claimed the lives of Edward Jacobs, 35, her ex-boyfriend, and his friend Anastasia Ettienne, 33.

According to Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz, Fakhri, 43, arrived at a two-story garage early in the morning and shouted, "You're all going to die today" before allegedly setting the structure on fire. Jacobs, who lived upstairs, was sleeping at the time. Ettienne attempted to save him after being alerted to the fire but both succumbed to smoke inhalation and thermal injuries, Katz's office confirmed.

"As alleged in this indictment, this defendant maliciously ended the lives of two people by setting a fire that trapped a man

and woman in a raging inferno. The victims tragically died from smoke inhalation and thermal injuries," Katz said in a statement.

A witness claimed Fakhri had previously threatened to burn Jacobs' house down and described their relationship as abusive. Jacobs had reportedly ended the relationship about a year ago, but his mother, Janet, said Fakhri had struggled to accept the breakup. Janet also revealed that Jacobs, a plumber, had been working on a project to convert the garage into an apartment.

Aliya Fakhri's mother defended her daughter, stating that Aliya was known for her caring nature and had struggled with opioid addiction after a dental mishap, which may have influenced her behavior.

Fakhri, who has been remanded in custody, faces a maximum life sentence if convicted. Her next court appearance is scheduled for December 9.

Actor Nargis Fakhri has not commented on the case.

US Fraud Case Against Adani Strong, But Extradition Unlikely



NEW YORK, NY (Reuters) – The U.S. fraud case against Indian billionaire Gautam Adani appears strong, legal experts say, but extradition to stand trial in the United States remains unlikely.

Federal prosecutors in Brooklyn unsealed an indictment in November accusing Adani of bribing Indian officials to secure electricity contracts for Adani Green Energy, a subsidiary of his Adani Group conglomerate, and misleading U.S. investors about the company's anti-corruption practices.


Adani, his nephew Sagar Adani, and another Adani Group executive face charges of securities fraud and conspiracy. Five individuals affiliated with Azure Power Global, a formerly U.S.-listed company, were also charged with conspiracy to violate the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA). Azure stated it cooperated with the investigation and that those charged no longer work for the company.

Prosecutors cited evidence including ledgers of alleged bribe payments found on Sagar Adani's phone and emails Gautam Adani sent himself regarding a search warrant and grand jury subpoena served on his nephew. These records could strengthen the case by demonstrating knowledge of misconduct and deliberate investor deception, experts suggest.

Adani Group has called the allegations "baseless," pledging to pursue legal remedies. Gautam Adani, who remains at large, has made public appearances in India, including at a December 9 event with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Challenges may include securing testimony from Indian witnesses, which could require New Delhi's cooperation. India's foreign ministry has not received any U.S. request on the case, referring to the matter as one between private firms and the U.S. Justice Department.

Conspiracy to violate the FCPA carries a penalty of up to five years in prison, while the fraud charges could result in up to 20 years. Drew Rolle, deputy chief of the Brooklyn U.S. Attorney's business and securities fraud section, emphasized the importance of protecting U.S. capital markets and warned that companies accessing these markets must "play by the rules."



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Tuesday, December 31st, 2024 9:00 PM to 1:00 AM	Abhishekam, Alankaram to all presiding deities, Bhajan, kirtan, and First Archana & First Darshan of the year 2025 and followed by Aaratis Bhajan Sandhya by Pundit Sidharth Pathak and Team			
Wednesday, January 1st, 2025 6:30 AM to 8:00 AM	Suprabatha Seva & Dhanurmasa puja			
8:00 AM to 9:00 PM	Group Archanas for every 20mins Last archana at 08:30 PM			
12:00 PM to 2:00 PM	Lunch Prasad	Dinner Prasad	8:00 AM to 9:00 PM	Abhishekam to all deities: \$151

Vaikuntha Ekadashi Celebrations

9th January 2025, 6:30 AM to 8:30 AM & 6:30 PM to 8 PM

06:30 AM – 07:00 AM	Sreevari Suprabhatam
07:00 AM – 07:30 AM	Procession along with Lord Venkateswara, Uttara Dwara Puja and pravesam
07:30 AM – 08:30 AM	Sri Devi - Bhoo Devi sameta Sri Prasanna Venkateswara Snapana Tirumanjanam (Abhishekam), Tiruppaavai, Sevakalam, Archana & Mangalasashanam
06:00 PM – 06:30 PM	Sri Shridi Saibaba Abhishekam
07:00 PM – 08:30 PM	Samoohika Satyanarayana Vratam
08:30 PM – 09:30 PM	Maha Mangala Aarati, teertha prasada vitarana, followed by Dinner prasada.

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13th & 14th January 2025

Monday, 13th January 2025



6 AM

Lohri Celebrations
(Bhogi Manta)



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NOTE: Please pick up your 2025 Temple Calendar.



Ambassador Eric Garcetti Confirms Bengaluru Consulate To Open In 2025

India-West News Desk

BENGALURU – US Ambassador to India Eric Garcetti announced that the long-awaited US Consulate in Bengaluru will officially open in January 2025. The announcement was made during a meeting of the US-India Business Council (USIBC) on Thursday, signaling a significant milestone in US-India relations.

Bengaluru, often referred to as India’s Silicon Valley, contributes 40% of the nation’s IT revenue and is home to millions of tech professionals. Until now, the absence of a dedicated US Consulate in the city forced many residents to travel to Chennai or Hyderabad

for visa-related services, creating logistical challenges for students, professionals, and entrepreneurs.

Highlighting the significance of the new consulate, Garcetti noted its potential to simplify visa processes, foster bilateral trade, and strengthen Bengaluru’s status as a global hub for technology and innovation.

Speaking at the USIBC meeting, Garcetti remarked, “Together, we are driving US-India relations forward for prosperity—creating opportunities not just for our people, but for the Indo-Pacific and the world.”

The consulate’s establishment is expected to boost US-India ties, particularly in the tech and innovation sectors, and facilitate smoother interactions between the two nations. It is anticipated to enhance access for thousands of visa applicants, including students aiming to study in the US and professionals engaged in cross-border collaborations.

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India Raises Security Concerns Over Khalistan Threat To Ambassador Kwatra



WASHINGTON, DC (ANI) – The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) on December 20 confirmed that India has taken “seriously” the recent threat issued by US-based Khalistan separatist Gurbatwant Singh Pannun against India’s Ambassador to the US, Vinay Mohan Kwatra. The issue has been raised with authorities in Washington.

In a video, Pannun, an India-designated terrorist holding American and Canadian citizenship, alleged that Kwatra is on the radar of pro-Khalistan Sikhs in the United States. He accused the Ambassador of coordinating with Russian authorities to provide intelligence inputs on the Khalistan network in the US.

“As and when such threats are issued, we take them very seriously and raise them with the US government. In this particular case, we have raised it with the US government, and it is our expectation that they will take our security concerns seriously and act on it,” said MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal during a weekly briefing in New Delhi.

In October, the MEA had addressed another case involving Pannun, confirming that a suspect named in a US Justice Department indictment was no longer an employee of the Indian government. The indictment alleged a foiled assassination plot against Pannun in New York City. According to US prosecutors, an Indian national, Nikhil Gupta, was recruited to hire a hitman for the plot, which was thwarted by US authorities.



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Semma, Of Chef Vijaya Kumar Retains Michelin Star For Second Year

NEW YORK, NY (ANI) - Chef Vijaya Kumar's South Indian restaurant Semma in New York City has retained the prestigious Michelin star.

On the official Instagram page of Semma restaurant, Vijaya's team shared the update by congratulating the chef.

"Congratulatory chef Vijay for maintaining the Michelin star for the third year in a row and continuing to hold the distinction of being the only Michelin-starred Indian restaurant in NYC. What an incredible achievement," the post read.

Chef Vijaya Kumar was born and raised in Natham, a small town in Tamil Nadu's Dindigul. He ran two restaurants in San Francisco called Dosa and Rasa. Rasa received a Michelin Star before it was closed in 2015.

He later collaborated with Roni Mazumdar and Chintan Pandya of Unapologetic Foods. Together, they launched Semma, a restaurant that sells authentic South Indian food.

Not only Chef Vijaya Kumar made Indians proud but Vikas Khanna also left everyone with his Michelin 2024 Bib Gourmand Award win.

Taking to Instagram, Vikas shared his picture with the Tricolor and wrote, "260 days of Bungalow and today we received the Michelin 2024 Bib Gourmand Award. While I've previously received the Michelin



Star 8 times, today felt different. I felt that it was for some higher purpose, it was like a tribute, it was like a promise to my land and to my people. To my sister."

He added, "This is just the beginning. We will work harder & harder everyday to give our guests an experience that will be a testament to Indian hospitality."

The comment section of his post is filled with congratulatory wishes."Happy tears... immmmmmense love to you chef," a netizen wrote."Heartiest congratulations," another wrote. Set in the bustling culinary hub of New York, Bungalow has managed to become audience favourite in a short span of time. It was opened in March 2024.

No Star But 'Bungalow' Of Vikas Khanna Gets Michelin Bib Gourmand Award



NEW YORK, NY (ANI) - Chef Vikas Khanna's restaurant, 'Bungalow', in New York did not earn a star but has won the Michelin 2024 Bib Gourmand Award.

Vikas shared his picture with the Tricolor and wrote, "260 days of Bungalow and today we received the Michelin 2024 Bib Gourmand Award. While I've previously received the Michelin Star 8 times, today felt different. I felt that it was for some higher purpose, it was like a tribute, it was like a promise to my land and to my people. To my sister."

He added, "This is just the beginning. We will work harder & harder everyday to give our guests an experience that will be a testament to Indian hospitality."

Bungalow has managed to become an audience favorite in a short span of time. It was opened in March 2024.

Khanna's culinary journey is truly inspiring. From his humble beginnings in Amritsar to becoming a chef who introduced Indian cuisine to the United States and cooked for luminaries like Barack Obama, and the Dalai Lama.

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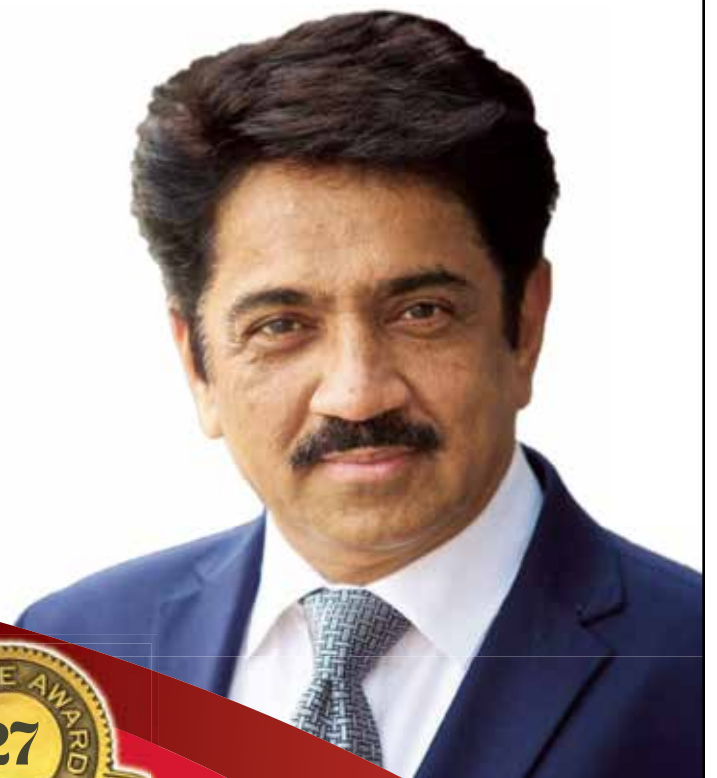
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HOLLYWOOD

Payal Kapadia First Indian To Get Golden Globes 'Best Director' Nomination

India-West Staff Reporter

Indian filmmaker Payal Kapadia has created history as the first Indian director to be nominated for Best Director at the Golden Globes. Her film All We Imagine As Light also earned a nomination for Best Non-English Language Motion Picture, solidifying its place as a standout in global cinema.

In the Best Non-English Lan-

guage Motion Picture category, All We Imagine As Light competes against acclaimed international films including France's Emilia Perez (the most-nominated film at this year's Golden Globes), The Girl With the Needle, I'm Still Here, The Seed of the Sacred Fig, and Vermiglio. For the Best Director honor, Payal Kapadia stands alongside renowned filmmakers Jacques Audiard (Emilia



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Pérez), Sean Baker (Anora), Edward Berger (Conclave), Brady Corbet (The Brutalist), and Coralie Fageat (The Substance).



New York Film Critics Circle, among other accolades.

The narrative follows Prabha, a nurse navigating personal challenges, and her roommate Anu in a

All We Imagine As Light, an Indo-French co-production, premiered in competition at the 2024 Cannes Film Festival, where it became the first Indian film in three decades to compete and won the prestigious Grand Prix. The film also received the Jury Grand Prize at the Asia Pacific Screen Awards, Best International Feature at the Gotham Awards, and Best International Film at the

coastal town. Featuring a stellar cast that includes Kani Kusruti, Divya Prabha, and Chhaya Kadam, the film explores themes of resilience and self-discovery.

Kapadia's groundbreaking achievement highlights the growing recognition of Indian cinema on the global stage, with the Golden Globes celebrating the diversity of international storytelling.

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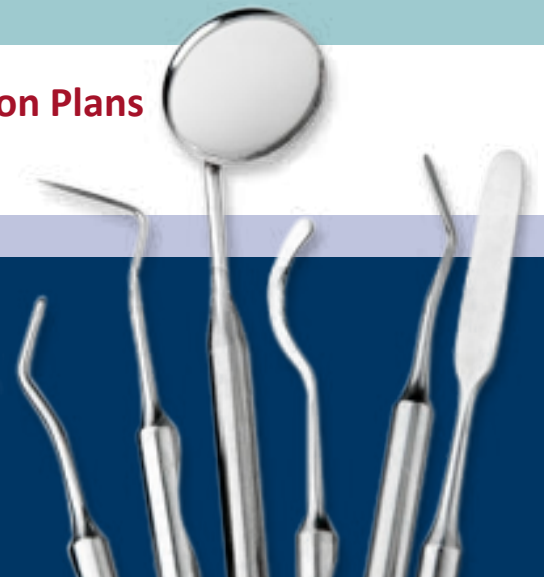
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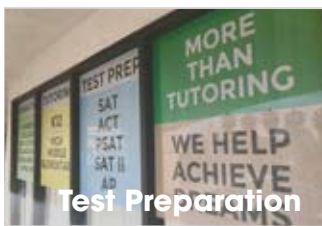


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Smriti Mundhra's Documentary On Capital Punishment

India-West News Desk

LOS ANGELES, CA – Indian American filmmaker Smriti Mundhra's latest documentary short, *I Am Ready, Warden*, has been shortlisted for the 2025 Oscars. The emotionally powerful film delves into the harrowing story of John Henry Ramirez, a man convicted of murder and sentenced to death in Texas. The documentary explores his final moments before execution, shedding light on the psychological and emotional toll of capital punishment.



Smriti Mundhra

Mundhra, who co-directed the project with Sami Khan, expressed her deep gratitude in a Facebook post, thanking everyone who supported the film's journey. She previously described the project as the "toughest film" she has ever made, noting the challenges of gaining the trust of those involved and gaining access to such a painful and intimate time in their lives.

Mundhra is widely known for creating Netflix's popular series *Indian Matchmaking*, which offers an inside look at the custom of matchmaking in Indian cultures. Her directorial debut, *A Suitable Girl*, premiered at the 2017 Tribeca Film Festival and earned her the Albert Maysles Prize for Best New Documentary Director.

'Anuja', Guneet Monga's Short Film On Child Labor

India-West News Desk

LOS ANGELES, CA – India's aspirations for the 2025 Oscars now rest on *Anuja*, a live-action short film produced by Guneet



Monga Kapoor, which has been shortlisted in the prestigious Best Live-Action Short Film category.

Anuja, co-produced by Monga, Adam J. Graves, and Suchitra Mattai, highlights the pressing issue of child labor in the garment industry. The film tells the poignant story of a gifted 9-year-old girl, Anuja (played by Sajda Pathan), who works in a garment factory in New Delhi. When given a rare opportunity to attend school, she faces a heart-wrenching decision that could shape her future and that of her sister, Palak (Ananya Shanbhag).

Monga, a trailblazer in Indian cinema, marks her third Oscar nomination with *Anuja*. Her previous productions, *The Elephant Whisperers* and *Period: End of Sentence*, won Oscars, solidifying her place as a significant force in bringing Indian stories to the global stage.



Guneet Monga Kapoor

The film, directed by Graves, was developed in collaboration with Salaam Baalak Trust, an India-based non-profit that supports street children. Founded by Dr. Praveen Nair, the trust was inspired by Mira Nair's film *Salaam Bombay!*, which exposed the harsh realities of street life for children in India. Pathan, who portrays Anuja, brings her personal experiences to the role, as she herself resides in an SBT home, which provides shelter and education to girls who once lived on the streets.

Anuja also stars Nagesh Bhonsle, known for his role in *Hotel Mumbai*, along with a talented production team including Krushan Naik, Aaron Kopp, and Alexandra Blaney, co-CEO of Shine Global.

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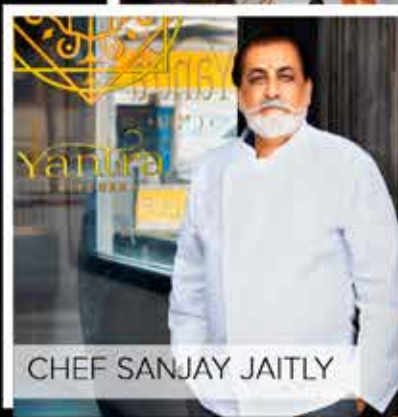
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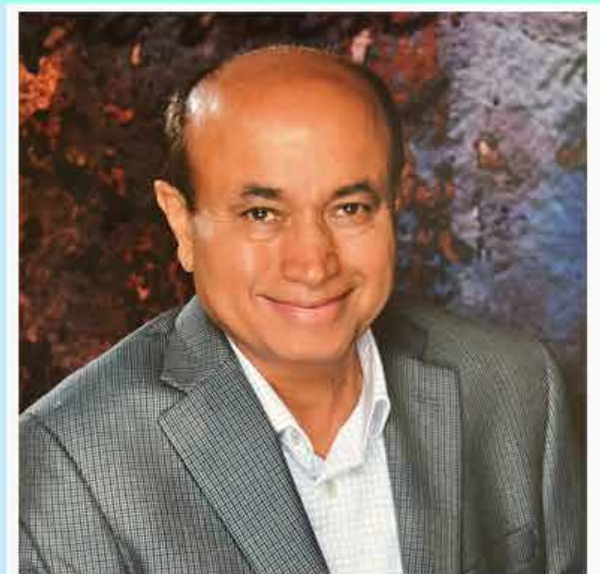
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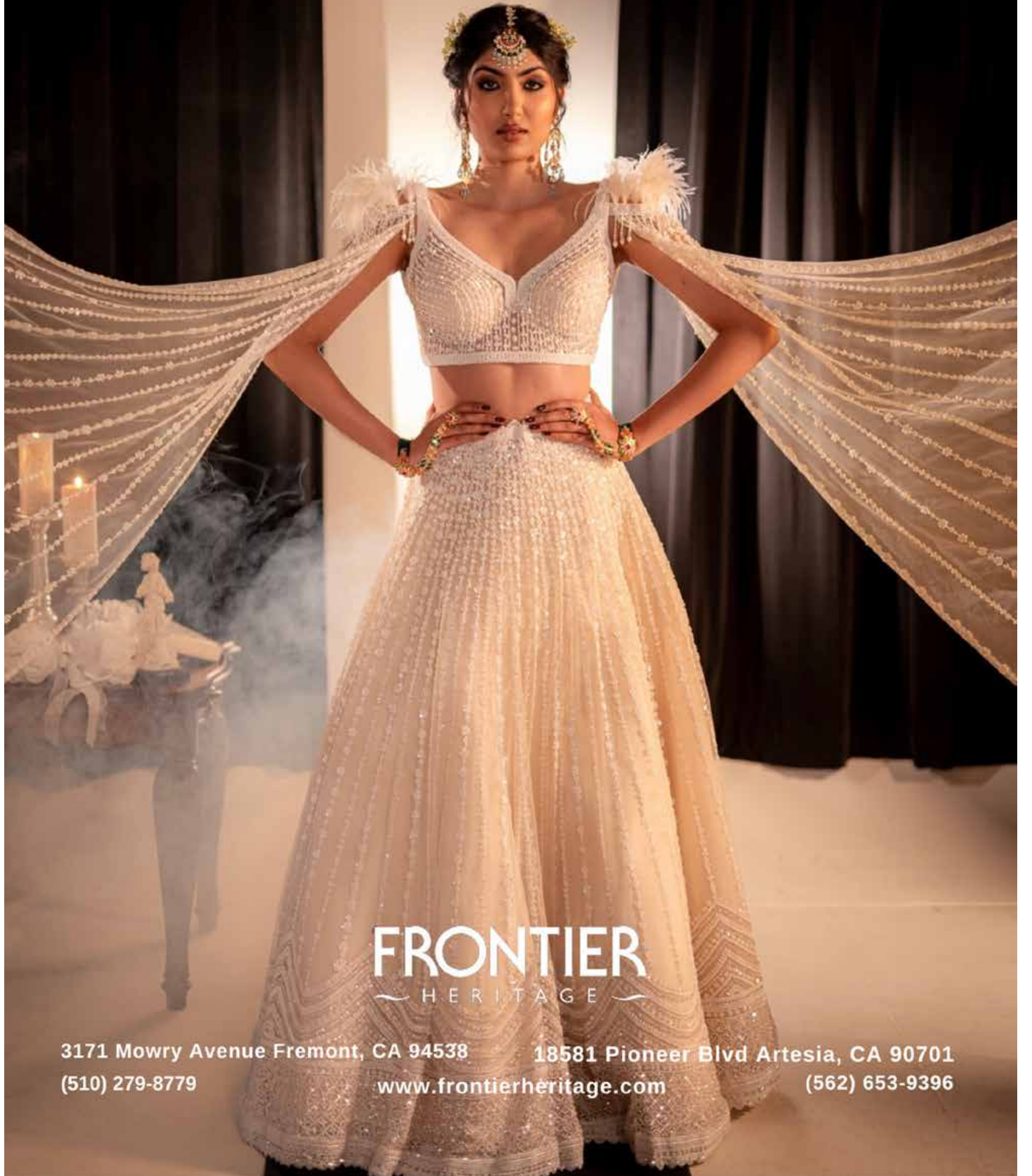


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