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Indian American CEOs Help Convert Trump Fundraising Cash Into Political Access

India-West News Desk

WASHINGTON, DC – During his political campaigns, President Donald Trump has often been seen on camera describing himself as “very greedy,” stating, “My whole life I’ve been greedy, greedy, greedy. I’ve grabbed all the money I can get.” Of course, making the pitch to his followers, he followed it with the idea he would be “greedy for the United States” when elected.

In office, Donald Trump has erased the border between lobbying and bribery even as his administration insists no such line has been crossed.

An investigation by The New York Times found that six Indian origin Americans or



the companies they lead are among major donors to the Trump presidency in 2025 and that their contributions were followed by clear benefits.

The report also documents presidential pardons for several donors who had been found guilty and were serving jail sentences, underscoring the transactional nature of the fundraising effort.

The NYT reports that the Trump Presidency set up multiple avenues to collect donations. The largest of these is MAGA Inc, a super PAC that raises and spends money to support Trump and allied causes. Additional money has been raised for other Trump-aligned entities, including America250,

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Gambhir Family Trust Endows Chair And Fellowship At UCLA With \$4 Million Gift

India-West News Desk

LOS ANGELES, CA – The University of California, Los Angeles, has received a bequest of more than \$4 million that will permanently strengthen the training of future physician scientists, marking one of the most significant recent private gifts to its Medical Scientist Training Program.

The gift, made through the Gambhir Family Trust, will fund a \$3 million endowed chair and a \$1 million fellowship at the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA. Together, the endowments are intended to provide long-term support for the UCLA Caltech Medical Scientist Training Program, a highly selective dual degree track that prepares physicians to bridge patient care and biomedical research.

Behind the multimillion-dollar bequest is a family shaped by scientific achievement and profound personal loss.

The gift honors the legacy of



The late Gambhirs.

Delcy Rodriguez, Who Now Leads Venezuela, Is Also A Devotee Of Sathya Sai Baba

NEW DELHI – As the world grapples with the news from Venezuela, one of the details to emerge is that Delcy Rodríguez, now serving as Venezuela’s acting President, is also a devotee of Indian spiritual guru Sathya Sai Baba, just like her predecessor, the captured President Nicolas Maduro. Devotional literature sales

Rodríguez’s ties to Sathya Sai Baba are rooted in her visits to Prasanthi Nilayam, the main ashram and spiritual headquarters of Sai Baba located in Puttaparthi in



Andhra Pradesh. According to official trust releases and news reports, she has traveled there on multiple occasions in recent years, describing her visits as deeply personal and spiritually meaningful.

Her first recorded visit was on August 5, 2023, when she was part of the Venezuelan delegation in India for the G20 Summit. Although the main

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“What unfolded was far more than a formal program; it was a shared experience. One that reminded everyone in the room of the importance of knowing who we are, where we come from, and what we carry forward,” one attendee said at the event held at the Cerritos Center for the Performing Arts, here.

The program opened with Dr. K. J. Srinivasa, Consul General of India in Los Angeles, who spoke passionately about the responsibility of Hindus and Indians to understand their real history and take pride in their civilizational legacy. He emphasized that when

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The Little Man In The Loincloth In Los Angeles

By BHUVAN LALL

In Los Angeles, where the endless streets are filled with dream factories and the enticing glow of the Hollywood sign burns eternal, a statue of an Indian stands, in a corner, on a quiet street crossing. It is small but looms large in cultural significance perhaps with far greater impact on humanity than all of Hollywood's glamour.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, born in 1869 in Porbandar, a dusty speck on the Kathiawar Peninsula, gazes out as a statue in Southern California. The bronze statue is less a monument or a work of art than a gesture representing passive resistance, soul force and reconciliation. But Gandhi is not merely a figure cast in metal, nor a name consigned to history's ledger.

In the world of today, his shadow flickers, distorted by time and argument. He is a paradox, a saint to some, a riddle to others, his legacy dissected by the nation of his birth that both reveres and reviles him. The young, scrolling through digital noise, question his place in the freedom struggle of India, their skepticism sharpened by half-truths and the internet's reckless churn. Politicians invoke him, their voices slick with opportunism, draping his name over ideologies he might scarcely recognize.

Yet no torrent of doubt can erode the moral weight of this small man, whose loin-cloth and spectacles made empires tremble. Even Jan Smuts, the Afrikaner general who stood against him in South Africa, saw it: "Men like him redeem us from a sense of commonplace and futility."

In 1915, Gandhi returned to India, stepping onto the Apollo Bunder in Bombay after decades of battling injustice in South Africa. From that moment until the Union Jack fell in 1947, he shaped a movement that was less a campaign than a philosophy, a stubborn insistence on non-violence that rippled across the globe. Subhas Chandra Bose, broadcasting from the jungles of Southeast Asia, called him the "father of the nation," while Gandhi, in turn, named Bose a "prince among patriots." Their mutual respect was a rare bridge across the fractious currents of India's struggle.

Gandhi's life was a pilgrimage through his own country, a journey marked by eighty visits to Delhi, where he lingered for 720 days. On January 28, 1948, two days before his death, he spoke with eerie prescience: "If I am to die by the bullet of a mad man, I must do so smiling. There must be no anger within me. God must be in my heart and on my lips."

And so it was, on January 30, at 5:17 p.m., in the garden of Birla House, (now Gandhi Smriti) that he fell, struck down on his way to prayer. The world came to mourn, dignitaries and commoners alike, drawn to the enigma of a fig-



There are seven full sized Gandhi statues in the U.S., pictured here is the one in Cerritos, CA.

such a man had walked the earth.

Gandhi's shadow stretched far. In 1959, Martin Luther King Jr. arrived in India, not as a tourist but as a pilgrim. At Rajghat, he laid a wreath on Gandhi's ashes and declared satyagraha, the philosophy of non-violent resistance, the only moral path to justice. Others followed: David Ben-Gurion, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Nelson Mandela, Lech Walesa, the Dalai Lama, even Steve Jobs, who stood before Gandhi's portrait in 1997 and spoke of the "crazy ones" who change the world.

In 2010, Barack Obama, addressing India's parliament, credited Gandhi's message for his own path to the White House. Earlier in 1983,

even Hollywood with its history of exclusions, and scandals, recognized Gandhi's greatness as a private man, without wealth or title, who led his nation to freedom. The bio pic directed by Richard Attenborough starring Ben Kingsley won 8 Oscars - the ultimate symbol of success in Tinseltown.

Yet Gandhi's true heirs are not the famous, not the statesmen or tech moguls who quote him. They are the unseen, the nameless ones who toil in obscurity, teachers in remote villages, volunteers in harsh climates, souls who light up the lives of the forgotten. They seek no statues, no headlines, no wealth. Their lives echo Gandhi's talisman, scribbled in 1948: "Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest... and ask yourself, if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him." These are the ones who embody swaraj, the freedom of the spirit, the liberation of the hungry.

In a corner of Los Angeles, Gandhi stands, silent, unobtrusive, a symbol for those who believe one life can shift the world's axis. His ideals, individual freedom, social justice, non-violence, persist, not in the clamor of politics but in the quiet acts of those who walk his path. They are the ones who prove, as Gandhi did, that truth, though frail, outlasts empires.

As we mark the beginning of another year, and another India Republic Day, we are called not to worship a man but to wrestle with his ideas. Gandhi's life was his message, a beacon for a world that too often forgets the power of one.

(Bhuvan Lall is a filmmaker, producer, connector between Bollywood/Indian cinema and global markets and an author on India's presence on the world stage.)

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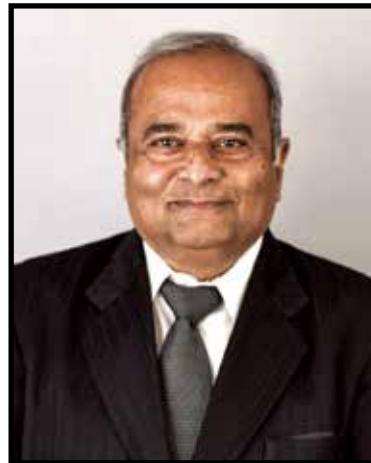
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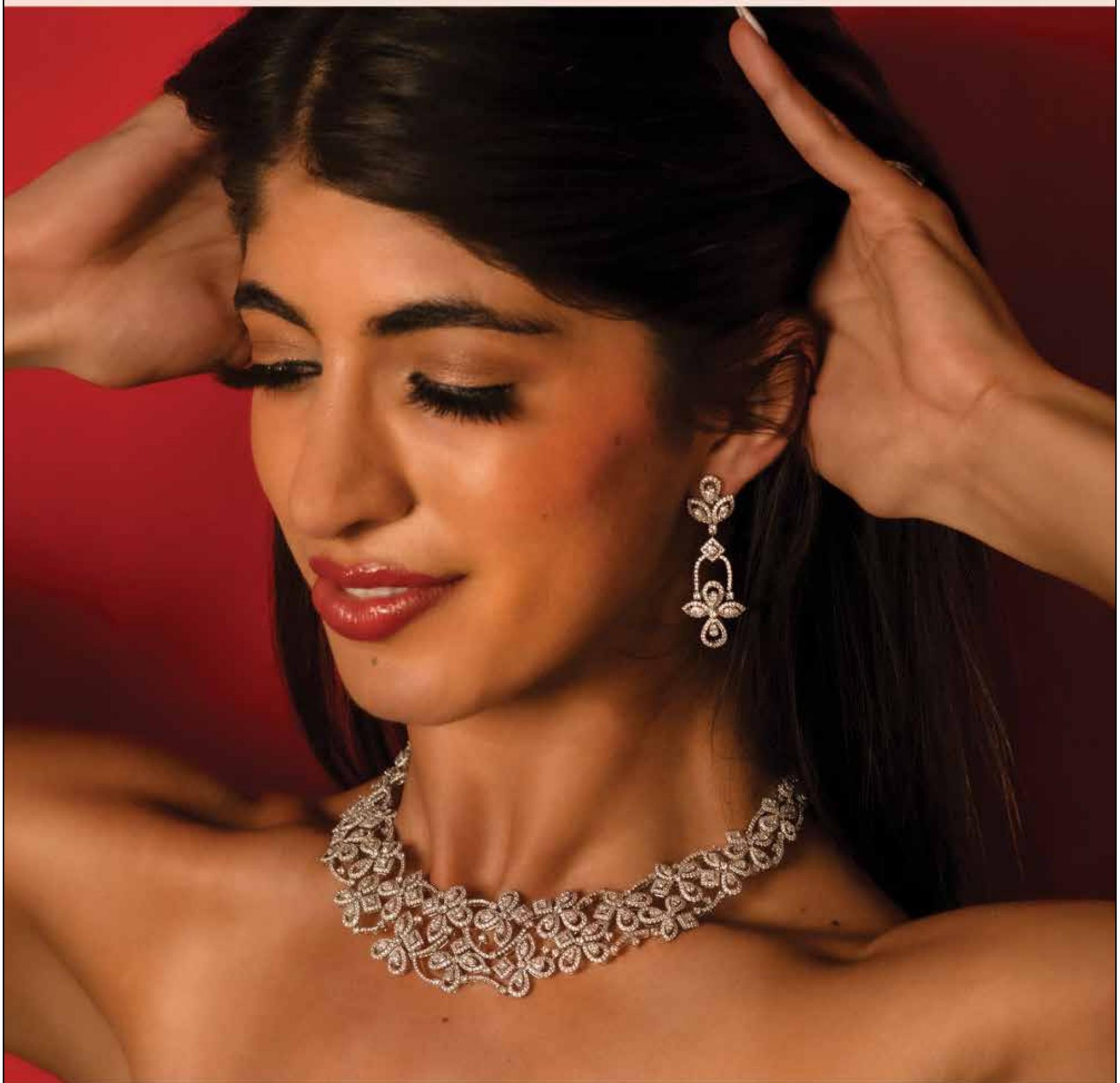
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Signals, Setbacks And Slow Repair Mark India-US Partnership In 2025

WASHINGTON, DC— India-US relations ran into trouble in 2025 after starting the year on a positive note. Political differences, trade disputes and sharp public messaging quickly tested the partnership. The year opened with momentum after Donald Trump returned to the White House on January 20. In the first 100 days, both sides moved quickly. The message was clear: the partnership would continue.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio held his first bilateral meeting in Washington with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on January 21, a day after the inauguration. Prime Minister Narendra Modi met President Trump in the Oval Office on February 13. US Vice President J D Vance travelled to India from April 20 to 24.

The optics mattered. They were noticed across capitals.

Several of India's critics raised eyebrows when EAM Jaishankar was seated in a prominent front-row position at Trump's inauguration. Such access is rarely extended to foreign ministers. In diplomatic circles, it was read as a signal. India appeared to enjoy early standing with the new administration.

At that stage, expectations were high. Defense cooperation remained strong. Indo-Pacific coordination continued. Technology and supply chain issues stayed on the agenda. There was also hope that a long-pending trade deal could finally move forward.

That phase did not last long.

By mid-year, the relationship entered rough weather. The first public rupture came when President Trump and senior members of his team claimed the US had "brought peace" between India and Pakistan. New Delhi reacted sharply, rejecting any suggestion of third-party mediation. That position has remained unchanged across governments.

The disagreement was not just about words. It signaled a deeper messaging gap.

Soon after, the Trump admin-



istration imposed a 50 per cent tariff on Indian imports. The move hit trade talks hard. The expected bilateral trade agreement collapsed. Plans for a Quad leadership summit in India were dropped. The annual 2+2 dialogue between foreign and defense ministers did not take place.

For the first time in many years, senior US officials spoke openly against India. The tone was blunt. The restraint seen in earlier years was missing.

At the same time, India's ties with other major powers added to Washington's discomfort.

New Delhi continued to deepen its engagement with Russia. The personal rapport between PM Modi and Russian President Vladimir Putin remained visible. India also continued buying discounted Russian oil, a move that did not sit well in Washington.

Senior US officials, including some from Trump's Cabinet and inner circle, went public with criticism. Some accused India of indirectly funding Russia's war in Ukraine through energy purchases.

India did not respond publicly. There was no war of words. But the tension was real. Indian officials made their position clear — energy

security and strategic autonomy were not negotiable.

India's outreach to China also drew attention.

PM Modi met Chinese President Xi Jinping during the Shanghai summit. New Delhi framed the engagement as an attempt to stabilize ties. Washington saw it differently, with some US officials viewing the optics with suspicion.

The issue spilled into the open when President Trump referenced the meeting in a social media post. The message was brief, but the displeasure was clear.

If these moves unsettled Washington, developments involving Pakistan unsettled New Delhi even more.

India was taken aback when Pakistan's Army Chief, General Asim Munir, was invited to the White House for a private lunch with Trump. Indian officials privately described the access as unexpected.

The unease deepened months later when Munir returned to Washington, this time accompanying Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif for a meeting in the Oval Office. In New Delhi, the optics were seen as a setback, reviving long-standing concerns about US engagement with Pakistan's

military leadership.

Despite the political friction, the strategic core of the relationship held.

Defense and intelligence cooperation continued quietly and steadily. India and the United States signed a new 10-year defense framework agreement. Signed by Defense Minister Rajnath Singh and Secretary of War Pete Hegseth, the document outlined long-term military cooperation, technology sharing and interoperability.

Security officials on both sides stressed the same point — shared interests outweighed short-term disputes. Maritime security, counterterrorism and regional stability remained common priorities.

Trade followed a different trajectory.

Despite the 50 per cent tariff, bilateral trade is believed to have increased during the year. Companies adjusted. Supply chains shifted. Business did not retreat. The numbers suggested commercial ties had developed a resilience of their own. Three major US companies — Microsoft, Google and Amazon — alone announced nearly USD 70 billion in investment in India's AI sector.

In December, cooperation took a

visible turn when the Indian Space Research Organization launched a US satellite into space. The mission underscored a reality often missed in political debates — high-technology collaboration between the two countries remained intact. India's Ambassador to the US, Vinay Mohan Kwatra, was invited to Mar-a-Lago.

People-to-people ties, however, came under pressure.

As restrictions on H-1B visas tightened and new visa rules were issued, Indian professionals in technology, healthcare and research felt the impact. Processing delays increased. Hundreds of families were left in limbo.

Indian students — who make up one of the largest foreign student groups in the US — were also affected. Visa uncertainty disrupted admissions and academic plans. The issue featured prominently in India's discussions with US lawmakers and administration officials, but relief remained limited by year-end.

Towards the end of the year, there were signs of improvement. PM Modi and Trump communicated directly by phone at least four times, according to their social media accounts. Officials described the conversations as frank and constructive, aimed more at stabilization than grand announcements.

India-US relations appeared steadier by the close of 2025. They had not returned to the optimism of early in the year, but open friction had receded.

The year left clear lessons. The India-US partnership is strong, but not immune to shocks. Strategic logic continues to bind New Delhi and Washington. Political alignment, however, cannot be assumed.

As both sides head into 2026, the relationship stands recalibrated, not reset — anchored by defense, trade and technology, and tested by a year that exposed both its strengths and its limits. (IANS)

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Darbar E Khalsa Draws Thousands For 40th Anniversary Gathering

**India-West Staff
Reporter**

POMONA, CA — Darbar E Khalsa once again brought together the Sikh community in a powerful display of faith and unity, with this year's gathering becoming especially memorable for the Sangat due to circumstances that unfolded against all expectations.

Weather forecasts had predicted a 95 percent chance of rain throughout December 25, with an estimated two to three inches of rainfall. However, as the morning of Darbar E Khalsa arrived, the rain stopped entirely. What followed was a clear and radiant day that many attendees described as nothing short of a blessing.

As members of the Sangat arrived at the Darbar, many shared that they had been praying for clear skies. Their collective ardaas, devotees said, was answered by Guru Sahib's kirpa. While large parts of Southern California experienced steady rainfall, Pomona remained sunny from morning until evening, allowing the Sangat to gather in joy, devotion, and gratitude.

In preparation for the forecasted weather, organizers had moved the entire program indoors. Babaji's hall was arranged with care and



reverence, and a red carpet welcomed the Sangat into the venue. Along the walkway, artwork and cutouts depicting the Chaar Sahibzaade greeted attendees as they made their way inside.

The program began promptly at 6:15 a.m. with Asa Di Vaar by the Akhand Kirtaniya Jatha. Over the course of the nine hour program, several youth groups and kirtan jathas, including the IIGS Jatha, participated in seva through shabad kirtan.

Dedicated sewadaars worked throughout the day to prepare refreshments and langar for the Sangat. Attendees also visited various vendor stalls set up along both sides of the hall. To ensure safety and ease of access, special trams and buses transported Sangat members from parking areas to the venue.

As the weather continued to remain clear later in the day, a Gatka team performed, adding to the celebratory and spiritual

atmosphere of the event.

The program concluded with a Nagar Kirtan, during which thousands of devotees chanted Satnam Waheguru and carried Babaji's Swaari in a special palki to a waiting helicopter. As the helicopter lifted off, the Sangat offered a heartfelt farewell, marking the close of another Darbar E Khalsa filled with devotion and remembrance.

Darbar E Khalsa was established in 1986 by the International Institute of Gurmat Studies with Waheguru Ji's grace. The annual event commemorates the life and Prakash Purab of Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji Maharaj and honors the supreme sacrifices of Sri Guru Teg Bahadur Sahib Ji, Mata Gujri Ji, and the Chaar Sahibzaade.

This year's gathering marked the 40th anniversary of Darbar E Khalsa, reinforcing its enduring significance for the Sikh community.



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Bera Family Turns Personal History Into A Global Medical Mission At UCI

India-West Staff Reporter

IRVINE, CA – Education has always shaped the Bera family's story, but at UC Irvine, it has found a lasting and practical expression through the India Summer Travel Program. At the center of this continuing effort is Dr. Rimal Bera, Clinical Professor of Psychiatry and Human Behavior at the UC Irvine School of Medicine, whose long-standing ties to the university and commitment to global health have helped turn a family legacy into an ambitious educational project for future physicians.

The Bera family's belief that education is the path to opportunity began with Kanta and Babulal Bera, who grew up in humble circumstances in Gujarat before immigrating to the US in the late 1950s. They worked multiple jobs, raised three sons – Raja, Rimal, and Ami (now a US congressman) – and pursued graduate degrees, modeling a philosophy of perseverance and service.

Their home in Los Angeles became a landing place for hundreds of students arriving from India and Africa to study. Rimal, who would go on to graduate from UC Irvine with both his undergraduate and medical degrees, remembers spending his childhood surrounded by young people determined to learn and make a life in their new country. That



shaped his own understanding of community, responsibility, and the transformative power of education.

It is fitting, then, that two generations of the Bera family have attended the UC Irvine School of Medicine and that UC Irvine is now the anchor of the family's most ambitious philanthropic project. In 2020, the Beras donated \$100,000 to the School of Medicine to permanently support medical student travel to Rajkot.

The goal was simple but far reaching. Students would be able to work in underserved communities, collaborate with local medical providers, and bring appropriate technologies and research to a region where health care resources remain limited.

For UC Irvine students, the experience would not only offer global clinical exposure but also reinforce the idea that medicine extends far beyond individual patient care.

The choice of Rajkot carries special meaning. As a young girl, Kanta

was the first girl from her village to attend middle school there. Her determination, shaped by the struggles of her childhood, later inspired her and her husband to establish an all-girls school in nearby Gondal.

The K B Bera School now houses and educates 600 girls from underserved villages, providing academic opportunity, mentorship, and stability for students who would otherwise have few options. UC Irvine medical students visit the school each year as part of the travel program, spending time with the girls and discussing public health, preventive care, and medical careers. The connection is personal, emotional, and deeply reinforcing for students who see firsthand what education can mean in a young life.

The clinical component of the India Travel Program takes students into the wards of Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay Medical College in Rajkot. Under the guidance of Dr. Bera

and local faculty, students work in medicine, psychiatry, obstetrics, surgery and community health. They observe how a vast public health system functions under resource constraints, and how Indian clinicians adapt creatively to reach patients in rural communities.

The program emphasizes humility, mutual learning, and cultural understanding. Students often describe the experience as a turning point in how they see themselves as physicians in training.

Dr. Bera believes that the greatest lessons are not technical but human. He often reminds students that the central challenge of medicine is not only diagnosis or treatment but understanding the responsibility physicians carry to their communities and to people far beyond them. This includes an obligation to advocate for better systems, policies and access to education and care. He sees the India program as a way to instill

these values early, when students are shaping their professional identities.

The early results reinforce that vision. Students returning from Rajkot bring with them a renewed sense of purpose. They reflect on encounters with children in clinics, elderly patients searching for help, and young girls at the KB Bera School who look to them for inspiration. They also bring back ideas for future research collaborations, public health projects and reciprocal exchanges.

The second group of nine UC Irvine medical students who returned from Rajkot early this year, Bera says, was also transformative, noting the enthusiasm and renewed commitment students expressed upon their return.

The long-term goal is ambitious. UC Irvine hopes to build formal clinical rotations in India for medical students, residents, and faculty, and to host Indian clinicians in Irvine. The vision also includes expanding the travel program to other University of California medical campuses, and on December 19, in its third outing, the program it has students from UC Davis.

At its core, the program seeks to build a sustainable and reciprocal partnership between UC Irvine and the Rajkot region, grounded in the Bera family's belief that education is the most enduring and life-changing gift.

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COMMUNITY

Long Beach Toy Drive Brings Holiday Hope to Families



India-West Staff Reporter

LONG BEACH, CA – Global Peace Foundation and UNA-USA Long Beach chapter brought holiday cheer to the community here with a toy donation drive for local children in need. The event, held

on December 22, aimed to ensure that every child experienced the joy of the season, regardless of their financial circumstances.

Dr. Manorama Gupta, President of both Associations, said that hundreds of new, unwrapped toys were collected through the gener-

osity of local residents and members of the two associations. The toys were distributed to families at Carmelitos Community Center, in Long Beach, brightening the holidays for countless children.

"We're deeply grateful for the incredible support from our commu-

nity," said Gupta. "These gifts are more than just toys; they symbolize hope, kindness, and the true spirit of giving." It was so satisfying to see beautiful smiles on the children's faces and receive thanks from parents. The volunteers organized three large tables laden with toys, from

which children picked their own choice of toys. The drive not only supported underprivileged families but also strengthened community bonds during the holiday season.

One of the recipient parents said, "Seeing my kids smile this Christmas meant the world to us."

GOPIO-LA Hosts Lively Diabetes Awareness Event

India-West Staff Reporter

ORANGE, CA – The Los Angeles chapter of the Global Organization of People of Indian Origin hosted its annual health summit titled 'Diabetes Awareness Prevention Is Key' bringing together medical professionals, wellness experts, nonprofit organizations, and residents to ad-

dress the growing challenge of the illness and heart disease.

Held on December 6, 2025, at Tandoor Restaurant banquet hall here, the event highlighted the importance of prevention through a blend of modern medical science, traditional Indian wellness practices, mindfulness, and holistic health approaches. Speakers emphasized

early intervention, lifestyle changes, and culturally relevant care models to help individuals take greater control of their long term health.

The seminar was chaired by Aparna Hande, RN, MSHCA, also a member of the GOPIO-LA chapter, with Dr. Asmath Noor serving as co chair. The expert panel featured Dr. Renu Joshi, an endocrinologist, who discussed preventive strategies and metabolic health management. Dr. Hema Ramkumar, a retina specialist, underscored the critical role of regular eye screening for individuals with diabetes to prevent vision loss.

Vandana Sinha, a quantum energy expert, spoke on holistic methods to support overall well being, while Dinesh Kulkarni, director of corporate development, introduced Kannact Starlight, a comprehensive diabetes care model that integrates technology with culturally sensitive patient support. Food scientist Yatri Shukla highlighted the nutritional benefits of millets and their role in maintaining balanced blood sugar levels.

Adding a creative dimension to the program, Saahas for a Cause, a nonprofit organization supporting underserved communities, presented an engaging skit that reinforced messages around prevention and healthy living in an accessible and memorable way.

Organizers noted strong audience participation throughout the program, with attendees actively engaging in discussions and gaining practical knowledge on nutrition, lifestyle modifications, early screening, holistic care, and community based support. Participating vendors also played an active role, sharing information about health related services and resources.

The summit was supported by several partner organizations, including SMAP-LA, NFIA, Rajput Association, Excel Foundation, Jagruti, Peace Center of Los Angeles, and the Lions Club of Fullerton.

The event concluded with a complimentary lunch designed to align with diabetes conscious dietary principles, offering participants an opportunity to network and continue informal conversations with speakers and fellow attendees in a relaxed setting.

While they're watching videos, their activity is being watched.

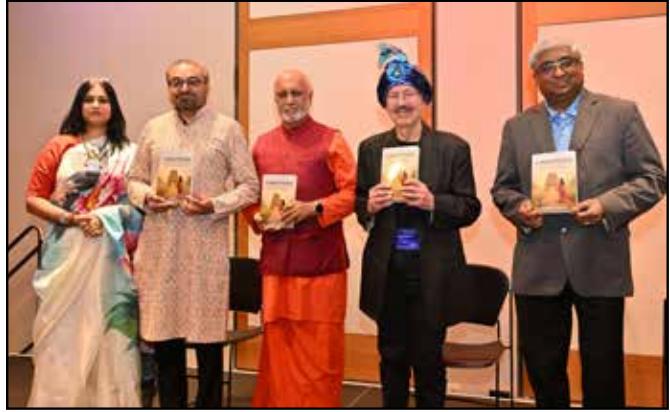


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Hindu Univ Cerritos Event Mulls Roots, Identity, Purpose



Esther Dhanraj is joined by HUA Chairman Dr. Jashvant Patel, Swami Ishwarananda, Swami Beyondananda, and Kalyan Viswanathan to release her new book "Unbaptized: Why I left Christianity and Returned to My Roots."



Kalyan Vishwanathan, President of Hindu University of America.



Swami Ishwarananda of Chinmaya Mission Los Angeles.

Contd. from P1

a community knows its roots, it stands taller, speaks clearer, and builds stronger futures.

Swami Ishwarananda, Senior Monk at Chinmaya Mission and head of the center in Los Angeles, followed with a compelling message on why Hindu studies are essential today. He explained how learning about our philosophical and cultural foundations is not simply academic, but fundamental to preserving identity, strengthening values, and guiding the next generation.

With warmth and thoughtful humor, Swami BeyondAnanda (Steve Bhaermer) offered reflections on spirituality that extend beyond

religious boundaries, focusing on human connection, compassion, and the deeper needs of a world searching for meaning and balance.

A moving moment of the morning came from Esther Dhanraj, author of 'Unbaptized.' She shared her personal journey of being converted to Christianity at the age of 12 in India, becoming a devoted believer, and later pursuing advanced studies in Christian theology at Divinity School in the US. Through her years of study, she began to distinguish between faith and organized religion, which led her to question her path. Eventually, that journey brought her back

to Hinduism, a return she described as a homecoming of both intellect and spirit. The room listened in complete silence as she spoke, deeply touched by her honesty and courage.

Throughout the morning, several attendees and supporters spoke about why they chose to support Hindu University of America: hope for an institution that preserves knowledge, builds leaders, and carries the wisdom of Sanatana Dharma forward with integrity and purpose.

The event was anchored by the vision and guidance of Kalyan

Vishwanathan, President of Hindu University of America, whose dedication to academic excellence and civilizational scholarship continues to shape HUA's growing impact.

Dr. Mahadevan Seetharaman, Dean of the California College of Ayurveda, reinforced the educational depth of the gathering, highlighting the importance of integrative knowledge systems rooted in India's traditional sciences.

Dr. Jashvant Patel, Chairman of the Board of Hindu University of America and a respected spine and pain management physi-

cian, was also present, lending his support and leadership to the event.

Ankur Patel, Director of Community Outreach, brought together families, leaders, and supporters from across Southern California, ensuring the event reflected HUA's core mission of engagement, service, and shared purpose.

As the program concluded, the room carried a quiet sense of collective resolve. People left not just informed, but inspired, grounded, and connected, with a renewed understanding of who they are and what they stand for.



Happy New Year

2026

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Toronto Consulate Establishes 24x7 Women's Help Center



India-West News Desk

TORONTO- The Consulate General of India in Toronto has established a dedicated One Stop Center for Women to support Indian women in distress, including those facing domestic violence, abuse, family conflict, abandonment, exploitation, and legal difficulties. The centre will operate from the Indian mission in Toronto.

In a statement, the Consulate said the facility will provide coordinated and beneficiary-centered assistance by linking affected women to timely and appropriate support services. This will include

immediate counselling, access to psycho-social support, and coordination of legal assistance and advice, while also helping women connect with relevant community and social service resources in Canada. The Consulate emphasized that all interventions by the centre will be carried out in accordance with local Canadian laws.

The One Stop Center will be run by a woman centre administrator and will offer safe, dignified and comprehensive assistance to women in need on a means-tested basis. Support will be provided through the prompt handling of distress calls via a 24x7 helpline and will

include counselling and emotional support through empaneled non-governmental organizations. Any financial assistance extended will be subject to means testing in line with Government of India rules, the statement added.

The announcement comes days after a 30-year-old Indian-origin woman, Himanshi Khurana, was found murdered in Toronto. Canadian police have issued a nationwide arrest warrant for 32-year-old Abdul Ghaffoori, a Toronto resident known to the victim, in connection with the killing, according to local media reports citing law enforcement officials.

Gambhir Family Trust Endows Chair And Fellowship At UCLA

Contd. from P1

Sanjiv "Sam" Gambhir, a UCLA-trained physician scientist who rose to international prominence as a pioneer in molecular imaging and early cancer detection. Gambhir, who earned his PhD and MD at UCLA in the early 1990s, died of cancer in 2020 at the age of 57. His

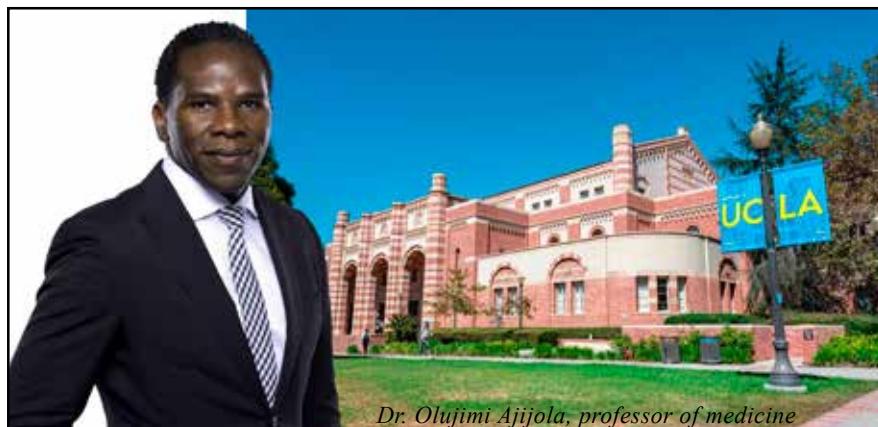
teenage son, Milan, died in 2015 after a nearly two-year battle with glioblastoma, the same aggressive brain cancer Gambhir studied in his laboratory. In 2023, his wife, Aruna Bodapati Gambhir, died af-

ter a long fight with breast cancer.

Sangeeta Gambhir, Sam Gambhir's sister, trustee of the Gambhir Family Trust and herself a UCLA-trained physician, said the family chose UCLA because of the central

role the institution played in her brother's life and career.

"When Sam died, medical science lost a great leader, as did our family," she said. "Although we are heartbroken by his death, we



Dr. Olujimi Ajijola, professor of medicine



know Sam's memory will live on in the future physician scientists and patients who will benefit from his legacy."

Born in Ambala, India, Gambhir moved to the US with his family as a child and was raised in Phoenix. A Phi Beta Kappa graduate in physics from Arizona State University, he came to UCLA for graduate training, completing a PhD in biomathematics in 1990 and a medical degree in 1993. He joined the UCLA faculty in 1994, where he helped shape the Crump Institute for Molecular Imaging and later served as vice chair of molecular and medical pharmacology.

In 2003, Gambhir moved to Stanford School of Medicine, where his career expanded dramatically. He became chair of radiology, and the founding director of multiple interdisciplinary centers, including the Canary Center at Stanford for early cancer detection. Over the course of his career, he co authored nearly 700 peer reviewed papers, held 40 patents and helped launch several biotechnology companies.

The death of his son Milan in 2015 profoundly influenced Gambhir's work. Colleagues have recalled how he intensified his focus on detecting disease at its earliest stages, driven by the belief that advances in precision health might one day spare other families similar loss.

His wife Aruna Bodapati Gambhir shared that vision. Trained in biochemistry, computer science and business, she earned her MBA from UCLA in 1996 and was widely regarded as a strategic and operational force behind the couple's advocacy for early cancer detection and precision medicine.

At UCLA, the Gambhir family's bequest will directly shape how future physician scientists are trained.

The endowed chair will support faculty leadership within the Medical Scientist Training Program, ensuring sustained mentorship and research guidance for students pursuing combined MD and PhD degrees. The fellowship will provide financial support to trainees, reducing the burden of educational costs and allowing students to focus on high risk, high reward biomedical research.

The UCLA Caltech MSTP integrates medical education with rigorous doctoral research, preparing graduates for careers at the forefront of academic medicine, biotechnology and translational science.

"This generous gift from the Gambhir family will go a long way toward supporting future medical science leaders," said Dr. Olujimi Ajijola, professor of medicine and co director of the program. "It reflects a deep understanding of how physician scientists are trained and why sustained investment is essential."

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Lawsuit Prompts CA To Pause Revocation Of Truck Driver Licenses, Duffy Reacts Sharply

India-West News Desk

SACRAMENTO, CA – After being sued by Sikh and immigrant rights groups, California has halted plans to revoke thousands of commercial truck driving licenses held by migrant drivers, delaying a move that had been set to take effect this week.

The California Department of Motor Vehicles announced that it will postpone the cancellation of approximately 17,000 non-domestic Commercial Driver's Licenses that were scheduled to be revoked

on January 5. Instead, affected drivers will be allowed to continue operating while they are given an additional two months to retest and reapply for their licenses.

U.S. Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy reacted sharply to the delay, reiterating a warning issued late last year. Duffy said the federal government could withhold up to \$160 million in transportation funding from California if the state fails to meet federal requirements to revoke licenses that the U.S. Department of Transportation has deemed unlawfully issued.

According to the DoT, failures allowed thousands of foreign drivers to receive commercial licenses in violation of federal rules in California.

Fatal crashes in 2025 in Florida and near Los Angeles spotlighted the problem for DoT. The drivers were Sikh, and their immigration status was questioned.

The DMV's decision to delay enforcement comes just days after it was sued in state court. The Sikh Coalition and the Asian Law Caucus filed a class action lawsuit on behalf of California drivers, arguing that immigrant truck drivers



are being unfairly targeted and that licenses are being cancelled over minor paperwork discrepancies rather than safety concerns.

According to the Los Angeles Times, an estimated 150,000 Punjabi Sikhs work in the American trucking industry.

USCIS Hikes Premium Processing Fees From March 1

WASHINGTON, DC – US Citizenship and Immigration Services announced an increase in fees for premium processing of several immigration benefits, including the H-1B visa, effective March 1.

USCIS said the premium processing fee has been increased to reflect the amount of inflation from June 2023 through June 2025.

The changes affect key employment-based and non-immigrant filings widely used by foreign professionals, including Indian nationals working or studying in the United States.

Under the revised fee schedule,

the premium processing fee for Form I-129 petitions for H-2B or R-1 nonimmigrant status will rise from \$1,685 to \$1,780.

Premium processing for all other available Form I-129 classifications – including H-1B, L-1, O-1, P-1 and TN visas – will increase from \$2,805 to \$2,965.

The same \$2,965 premium processing fee will apply to Form I-140 immigrant petitions for alien workers across employment-based categories, up from the previous \$2,805, USCIS said.

Premium processing fees will also rise for certain applications

to extend or change nonimmigrant status. For Form I-539 applications covering F-1 and F-2 students, J-1 and J-2 exchange visitors, and M-1 and M-2 vocational students, the fee will increase from \$1,965 to \$2,075.

For applicants seeking expedited employment authorization, USCIS said the premium processing fee for Form I-765 applications – including Optional Practical Training (OPT) and STEM-OPT classifications – will increase from \$1,685 to \$1,780.

USCIS emphasized that the increased revenue would be used to

support agency operations. “The revenue generated by this fee increase will be used to provide premium processing services; make improvements to adjudication processes; respond to adjudication demands, including processing backlogs; and otherwise fund USCIS adjudication and naturalization services,” the notice said.

The fee changes are expected to have a direct impact on Indian professionals, students and employers, who make up a significant share of H-1B, L-1, employment-based green card and OPT filings.

Premium processing is often

used by employers and applicants seeking faster adjudication timelines for job changes, extensions, travel planning and status certainty.

Indian nationals are the largest beneficiaries of US employment-based visas, particularly the H-1B programme, and also account for a substantial portion of the employment-based green card backlog.

Optional Practical Training and STEM-OPT extensions are widely used by Indian students graduating from US universities as a bridge to longer-term work visas such as H-1B. (IANS)



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9:00 pm – 12:00 am	Rudraabhishekam
12:00 am	Mahamangala Aarati

CULTURAL PROGRAM: 4:30 pm – 9:00 pm

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Starbucks Taps Anand Varadarajan As New CTO

India-West News Desk

SEATTLE, WA -Starbucks has appointed technology executive Anand Varadarajan as its new Executive Vice President and Chief Technology Officer, effective January 19.

The move marks a key leadership transition as the global coffee chain accelerates its technology transformation. The appointment was announced by CEO Brian Niccol, who confirmed that Varadarajan will join the Executive Leadership Team and report directly to him.

Varadarajan succeeds Deb Hall Lefevre, who retired in September. The transition comes as the company continues efforts to modernize

in-store technology to improve labor efficiency and operations.

Varadarajan joins the coffee giant after nearly 19 years at Amazon, where he focused on customer-centric design and operational agility. His earlier career includes software engineering roles at Oracle and work with several startups.

An alumnus of the Indian Institute of Technology, Varadarajan holds master's degrees in civil engineering from Purdue University and computer science from the University of Washington. Outside of work, he is an avid runner aiming to complete all seven 'World Marathon Majors'.



US FDA Reports Recall Of Sun Pharma's Antifungal Shampoo

WASHINGTON, DC - Sun Pharma's US arm, Taro Pharmaceutical Industries, has recalled more than 17,000 units of antifungal shampoo over manufacturing issues, the US Food and Drug Administration (USFDA) has said.

The Ciclopirox Shampoo, an antifungal medication that treats

seborrheic dermatitis, a condition that causes dry, flaky, and itchy skin, is being recalled due to "failed impurity/degradation specifications", the USFDA said in its latest Enforcement Report.

The Class II nationwide recall of 17,664 units of the Ciclopirox Shampoo was initiated by the

company on December 9.

The USFDA defines a Class-II recall as a violative product whose use, or exposure to, may lead to temporary or medically reversible health consequences, or when the likelihood of serious adverse health outcomes is minimal.

Taro is a private company and

wholly owned by Sun Pharma.

The Israel-based company was acquired by Sun Pharma in a deal valued at \$347.73 million last year. Sun Pharma has been the majority shareholder of Taro since 2010. Primarily focused on dermatology, Taro produces a wide range of prescription and over-the-counter products.

Sun Pharmaceutical Industries is a lead exporter to the US market, with revenue of Rs 14,478 crore in the second quarter of FY26.

While the drug major's net profit rose 2.56 percent year-on-year to Rs 3,118 crore, formulation sales in the US declined 4.1 percent to \$496 million. (IANS)

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PERSONAL PROFILE

An experienced CPA and a Chartered Accountant. I have worked with many big 100 Fortune Companies in diversified industries at various management levels. I have extensive experience in Tax Filings and Tax related matters and practicing in Los Angeles and S.F. Valley since 2006.

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 - Electronic Tax Payments.
 - Standard Payroll reports.
 - Quarterly/Yearly Payroll Tax returns.
4. Management Services & other Services :-
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 - Inventory control and management.
 - Formation of Partnerships and Corporations.
 - Other advisory services.

Jayshree Ullal Tops Hurun India 2025 Rich List



India-West News Desk

SANTA CLARA, CA -Tech executive Jayshree Ullal has emerged as the wealthiest Indian origin leader in the global tech sector, according to Hurun India's latest Rich List for 2025.

Hurun India ranked Ullal, the Chief Executive Officer and President of Arista Networks, ahead of other prominent technology leaders, including Google CEO Sundar Pichai and Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella.

Ullal has led Arista Networks for 17 years. She joined the cloud networking company in 2008 and currently oversees its portfolio of software-driven networking products. Before Arista, she held senior roles at Cisco Systems, AMD, and Fairchild Semiconductor.

According to Forbes, Ullal's net worth stands at \$5.7 billion, placing her at 713th on the global rich list. Her wealth has increased by \$34 million since 2020, a period marked by growth in artificial intelligence and software-driven services. Arista Networks reported \$7 billion in revenue in 2024, as per the same data set.

Earlier this year, Ullal was ranked second among the top five first-generation women wealth creators in the Candere Hurun Indian Women Leaders List 2025. At 63, she remains one of the most prominent women leaders in a sector traditionally dominated by men.

While the net worths of several other Indian-origin technology leaders have seen recent declines, Ullal's financial standing has continued to rise, reflecting the sustained performance of her company.

Born in the UK, Ullal completed her schooling at the Convent of Jesus & Mary in New Delhi. She later moved to the United States, earning a Bachelor of Science in Electrical and Electronics Engineering from San Francisco State University, followed by a Master of Science in Engineering Management from Santa Clara University in 1986. In 2025, she was also awarded an Honorary Doctorate in Engineering.

ELECTIONS

Vivek Ramaswamy Leans On Political Pro As Running Mate To Offset Lack Of Governing Experience



India-West News Desk

CINCINNATI, OH — GOP front runner Vivek Ramaswamy's campaign is sharpening its case about governing Ohio, and it is leaning heavily on his choice of running mate to make that argument as a key endorsement now falls into place.

At a January 7 event in Cleveland introducing state Senate President Rob McColley as his pick for lieutenant governor, Ramaswamy emphasized what he wants from the partnership if he gets into office as Governor: a governing partner who understands the legislature and can help turn campaign priorities into law. Ramaswamy's lack of any governing experience has been seen as a handicap.

That framing of the running mate pick gained new momentum this week after Ohio Governor Mike DeWine formally endorsed the ticket. The endorsement is notable for its timing. DeWine had so far held back in throwing his weight behind Ramaswamy.

DeWine highlighted McColley as a decisive factor, calling the choice of lieutenant governor the "first important decision a governor makes," and describing McColley as a "strong, well respected leader in the General Assembly who brings geographic balance to the ticket."

McColley also adds a regional dimension the campaign says is essential. A resident of Napoleon in northwest Ohio, he is meant to signal that a Ramaswamy administration would not be focused solely on urban and suburban areas.

Silicon Valley Investor Among Top MAGA Inc Donors

WASHINGTON, DC — Silicon Valley investor Asha Jadeja Motwani has emerged as one of the largest diaspora contributors in the current US election cycle, donating more than \$5 million to the pro-Trump super PAC MAGA Inc., according to federal campaign finance filings.

The filings, which list contributors of \$100,000 or more, show Jadeja reported a \$5 million contribution from California in November 2025, placing her among a small group of ultra-wealthy donors backing the political action committee. Her election-to-date total stands at just over \$5.1 million, according to

the disclosure.

Jadeja's name appears alongside some of the most influential figures and entities in American technology, finance and investment. At the top of the list is Foris DAX, the operator of Crypto.com platform, which has contributed \$20 million in a single reported entry and \$30 million to



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date in this election cycle. OpenAI president and co-founder Greg Brockman is listed as having contributed \$25 million.

Konstantin Sokolov, an executive at IIS Investments, is listed with \$11 million, while several additional contributions run into the multi-million-dollar range.

In addition to Jadeja, there are only two other donors at the \$5 million level: Blackstone chairman and chief executive Stephen A. Schwarzman and investor Benjamin Landa. Both are based in New York.

The donor list also reflects a strong presence of technology- and crypto-linked firms. Gemini Trust Company, a major cryptocurrency exchange, is listed with nearly \$1.5 million in contributions and more than \$4.4 million election-to-date. Financial institutions such as JPMorgan Chase Bank, N.A., as well as advisory and investment firms, also feature prominently.

Jadeja's contribution stands out as one of the largest known

political donations by an Indian-origin individual in the current filing, underscoring the growing financial and political engagement of sections of the Indian American community in US electoral politics. Her donation places her in the same donor bracket as some of the most powerful corporate and individual backers of MAGA Inc.

The filings also list contributions from individuals, limited liability companies and political action committees, with donations ranging from \$1 million to several hundred thousand dollars. The disclosures underline the scale of money being raised by the super PAC in the current election cycle.

Under US law, super PACs such as MAGA Inc. are allowed to raise unlimited funds from individuals and corporations. They are barred, however, from coordinating directly with a candidate's campaign, a distinction that has reshaped how elections are financed. (IANS)

Mamdani Appoints Lekha Sunder To Communications Staff



India-West Staff Reporter

NEW YORK, NY – City Hall has announced that Mayor Zohran Mamdani has appointed Lekha Sunder as New York's Deputy Communications Director, tasking her with shaping messaging and coordinating communications strategy across city government.

Sunder joined Mamdani's primary campaign in February and played a central role in expanding its reach across traditional, digital, and earned media. Her work helped strengthen the campaign's media footprint and align its messaging as it gained traction.

Prior to joining the Mamdani campaign, Sunder worked in communications for Vice President Kamala Harris, serving in Harris' presidential campaign in Pennsylvania.

The 26 year old is a 2023 graduate of Yale University, where she majored in Global Affairs. While at Yale, she also worked as a contributing reporter for the Yale Daily News where she might have honed her understanding of media narratives.

Under the City Hall communications structure, Sunder will work under the direction of Communications Director Anna Bahr, a longtime Bernie Sanders staffer.

Arjun Mody Takes Charge As Deputy Commissioner Of Social Security

WASHINGTON, DC – Arjun Mody was sworn in on January 5 as Deputy Commissioner of the US Social Security Administration (SSA), taking on the role of chief operating officer at an agency that delivers benefits to tens of millions of Americans and manages one of the largest budgets in the federal government.

Mody was confirmed by the US Senate on December 18, 2025. His term runs through January 19, 2031.

As deputy commissioner, Mody will assist in administering SSA's core programs and operations, including directing agency policy development and overseeing financial management systems. During his confirmation hearing before the Senate Finance Committee, Mody said President Trump had been "strong and straightforward about Social Security which is to preserve and protect the promise for every eligible American." He added, "If confirmed, I will carry that charge."

The hearing also featured sharp partisan exchanges. Senate Finance Committee Ranking Member Ron Wyden raised concerns about Mody's lack of direct Social



Security policy experience and questioned whether he was prepared to lead the agency during periods when the commissioner might be occupied with other responsibilities. Wyden cited long wait times and service backlogs as evidence of what he called a

"customer service crisis." Before his nomination, Mody served as a senior official on the Trump–Vance transition team and previously led the third-ranking leadership office in the US Senate as staff director of the Senate Republican Conference. He also worked on Capitol Hill for Senators Elizabeth Dole, Kay Bailey Hutchison, and John Barrasso.

Mody began his career as a Presidential Management Fellow at the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy and later worked as a principal at S-3 Group, advising

Fortune 100 companies on legislative strategy, regulatory engagement, and public affairs. He is a graduate of La Salle University, Arizona State University's Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law, and American University's Washington College of Law. (IANS)

Raja To Step Down As Ranking Member Of House China Panel

WASHINGTON, DC – Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi, the Ranking Member of the House Select Committee on the Strategic Competition Between the US and the Chinese Communist Party, on January 5 announced that he will step down from his leadership role on the panel later this month, bringing to a close a three-year tenure that coincided with the committee's formative period.

"I have informed Leader Hakeem Jeffries of my intention to step down as Ranking Member of the Select Committee on the Strategic Competition Between the United States and the Chinese Communist Party later this month," Krishnamoorthi said in a statement.

"I am deeply grateful for the confidence Leader Hakeem Jeffries placed in me to lead House Democrats on this Committee for the past three years," he said, describing the decision to appoint "the first South Asian American to ever lead a Congressional Committee, as Chair or Ranking Member" as part of Jeffries' "enduring legacy".

While he did not give a reason for his stepping down, Krishnamoorthi is currently running for the US Senate and is expected to remain focused on his campaign. Meanwhile, Politico reported that Jeffries on January 5 said that Rep. Ro Khanna (D-CA) would take over as the top Democrat for the remainder of the 119th Congress.

"We thank Ro for his continued determination, strong sense of purpose and commitment to the work needed to safeguard our economy, defend our national security and protect human rights around the world," he said. (IANS)

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DNI = Do Not Invite: Tulsi Gabbard Sidelined From Venezuela Operation

India-West News Desk

WASHINGTON, DC – Tulsi Gabbard's absence from the public and strategic spotlight during one of the most dramatic military operations of the year has ignited open speculation.

Reports that the Director of National Intelligence was not present for critical planning around the raid that captured Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro have raised questions about whether her long-held anti-war positions have left her sidelined at the highest levels of national security decision-making.

For days after the January 3 operation, Gabbard was notably missing from White House announcements and official photos of senior advisers monitoring the mission. It was only on January 6 that she publicly acknowledged the raid, posting praise for U.S. troops and intelligence personnel – a marked contrast with

other high-ranking officials who spoke openly about the mission as it unfolded.

According to multiple reports, Gabbard was excluded from months of planning. Sources told Bloomberg that her previous opposition to U.S. military involvement in Venezuela and other foreign interventions cast doubt among senior aides about her support for the mission, leading to her omission from key discussions.

Some White House staffers reportedly even joked that her title, Director of National Intelligence, or DNI, might as well stand for "Do Not Invite."

Yet the administration has pushed back sharply on narratives about strain within the national security team. Vice President JD Vance told reporters that claims Gabbard was left out of planning are "completely false," insisting that the operation's secrecy was the reason for limited participation and

that all senior officials, including Gabbard, were "part of the same team."

Still, the reports have drawn attention to the broader tensions between Gabbard's long-standing anti-interventionist philosophy and the Trump administration's increasingly assertive foreign policy moves. Years before her appointment as DNI, Gabbard was a vocal critic of U.S. regime-change campaigns, including in Venezuela. In 2019, as a Democratic congresswoman, she warned that U.S. intervention in the country would be "disastrous," underlining historical patterns of harm tied to American foreign policy in Latin America and arguing that Caracas posed no threat to U.S. security.

That skepticism toward military force has been a hallmark of her public persona since her 2020 presidential campaign, when she championed ending costly overseas engagements.



Indian American CEOs Cash Into Access

Contd. from P1

which is organizing events to mark 250 years of US independence.

Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella donated \$3.5 million. In return, he was invited to Trump's swearing in ceremony and granted regular access through private dinners. Microsoft also benefited from administration policies that restricted US states from enforcing their own artificial intelligence regulations, easing the company's

compliance burden.

Google CEO Sundar Pichai donated \$1.2 million. The administration later settled a lawsuit Trump had personally brought against Google after the company agreed to contribute \$24.5 million toward Trump's ballroom project, ending a legal dispute that had hung over the company.

Anjani Sinha, a Bihari orthopedic surgeon, emerged as a major non tech donor. Considered unquali-

fied for the job, a donation earned the office of the US ambassador to Singapore, despite objections raised during confirmation hearings.

Adobe CEO Shantanu Narayen donated \$1 million. He received direct access to Trump, including invitations to private dinners and overseas trips, placing him among a small circle of corporate executives with personal reach to the president.

Micron Technology CEO Sanjay Mehrotra donated \$1 million. Mi-

croon benefited from Trump administration policies strongly favoring domestic chipmakers, including public backing and regulatory decisions that aligned closely with the company's business interests.

IBM CEO Arvind Krishna donated \$750,000. Like other top tech donors, he received privileged access to the president through exclusive events and meetings unavailable to non donors.

The New York Times found

nearly 200 high level donors received tangible benefits such as pardons, dropped or softened legal action, favorable policy decisions, government contracts, or senior appointments.

The Trump administration has denied any quid pro quo, but the investigation highlights the unprecedented scale of post inauguration fundraising and the repeated alignment between large donations and presidential action.



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Seizure Of Russian Oil Tanker: 3 Indian Sailors In US Custody

WASHINGTON, DC -Three Indian nationals are among the 28 crew members aboard a Russian-flagged oil tanker seized by United States forces in the North Atlantic.

The vessel, named 'Marinera' and previously known as 'Bella 1,' was intercepted after a prolonged maritime pursuit that reportedly began in the Caribbean Sea and extended into the North Atlantic.

According to reports, the tanker was carrying a multinational crew comprising 17 Ukrainians, six Georgians, three Indians and two

Russians, including the ship's captain. All crew members are currently in US custody, although authorities have not indicated when or under what conditions they may be released.

The seizure took place on January 7 following what has been described as a coordinated operation by US agencies, with support from British forces. US officials have alleged that the tanker had links to Venezuela and may have been involved in efforts to circumvent international sanctions. (IANS)

Media reports quoting US authorities said the operation was jointly carried out by the US Coast Guard and military units, with assistance from the United Kingdom. British airbases were reportedly used to support the operation, while Royal Air Force surveillance aircraft tracked the tanker as it moved through waters between Iceland and the United Kingdom. The seizure has triggered sharp reactions from Russia. Moscow condemned the action, describing it as a violation of international maritime law. (IANS)



Delcy Rodriguez



Contd. from P1
purpose of that trip was diplomatic, Rodriguez took time for a personal pilgrimage to the ashram to pay her respects.

Nearly a year later, on October 26, 2024, she returned to Prasanthi Nilayam as Executive Vice President of Venezuela, accompanied by Venezuela's Ambassador to India.

Reports that Maduro and his spouse were devotees of Sathya Sai Baba have circulated for years, and Rodriguez's similar devotion adds a lesser-known dimension to the country's political narrative.

Trump's Sanctions On Nations Doing Trade With Iran Makes It Difficult For India

NEW DELHI - India, which is already facing steep 50 percent US tariffs, is likely to be affected, among other countries trading with Iran, after President Donald Trump announced 25 percent tariffs on any country doing business with Tehran.

New Delhi is among Tehran's top five trade partners. India exported goods worth \$1.24 billion to Iran and imported goods worth \$0.44 billion in the financial year 2024-25, resulting in a total bilateral trade of \$1.68 billion, according to official data.

"India and Iran are important trade partners. India has been among Iran's five largest trade partners in recent years. Major Indian exports to Iran include

rice, tea, sugar, pharmaceuticals, manmade staple fibres, electrical machinery, artificial jewellery, etc. In contrast, major Indian imports from Iran consist of dry fruits, inorganic/organic chemicals, glassware, etc," according to the information available on the website of the Indian Embassy in Tehran.

India and Iran signed a MoU in 2015 to jointly cooperate on the development of the Shahid Beheshti Port at Chabahar, Iran.

According to the Embassy, India continues to cooperate closely with Iran in realising the vision of Chabahar Port as a major regional and international hub.

The United States recently extended a six-month sanctions

waiver for India to continue its operations at the Chabahar port, effective from October 29. The extension was seen as a diplomatic win for India, especially amid broader tensions involving US sanctions on Iran and Russia.

India can now continue developing and operating the terminal at least till April next year without facing punitive sanctions from Washington. The port is crucial for India's access to Afghanistan and Central Asia, allowing it to bypass Pakistan for trade and connectivity.

While China is Iran's largest trading partner, India, the UAE, and Turkey could also face trouble with the new US tariffs, according to industry experts. (IANS)



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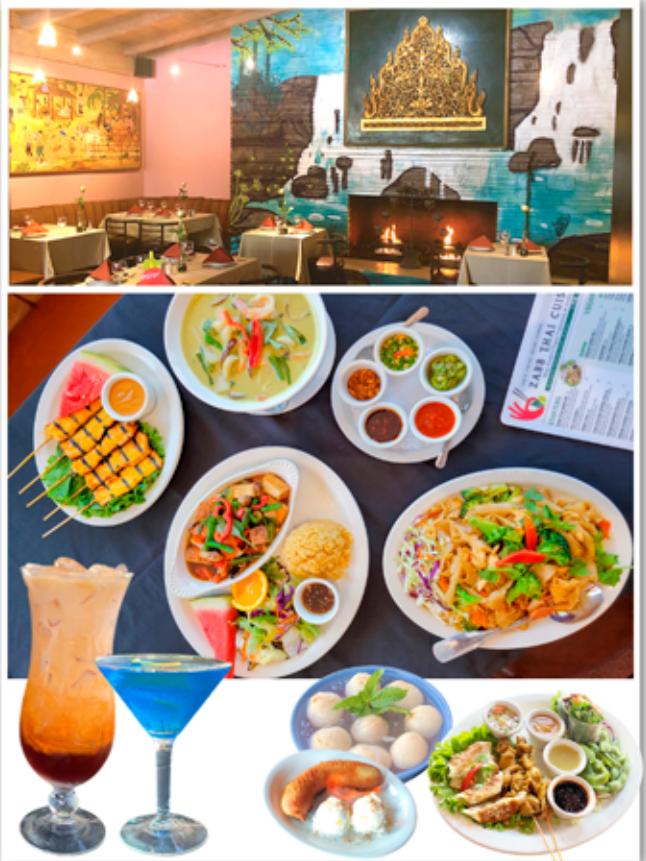
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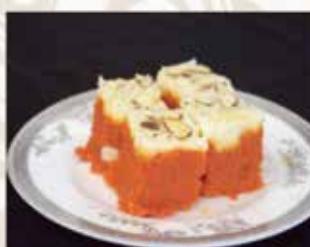
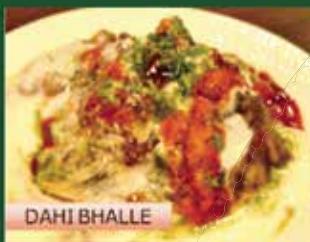
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India: Aware Of America's 500% Tariff Bid, Acting With Great Care

NEW DELHI- India on January 9 said that it is aware of the US bill that proposes to raise tariffs on countries buying energy products, including oil, from Russia to at least 500 per cent, adding that it is dealing with the issue with "great care".

Emphasizing that ensuring stable energy prices and secured supplies have been the twin goals of the country's energy policy, the Ministry of External Affairs said

that the country has focused its attention on the evolving issues around the US bill, titled the "Sanctioning of Russia Act 2025".

"The bill you are talking about, the proposed bill; we are aware of it. We have focused our attention on these issues and on this bill with great care," a spokesperson said.

"Along with that, I would like to tell you that as far as the question of energy sources is concerned, you are well aware of what our attitude

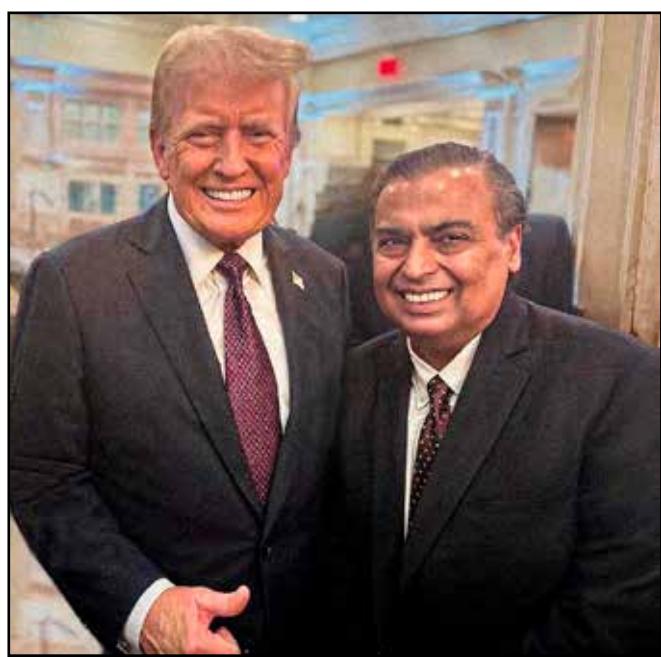
is and what our approach is. On energy sourcing, our position has been clarified several times," he noted.

He said that whether India buys oil from one region or another, "we follow a broad approach". "It is based on two imperatives — one is the available or evolving global dynamics and two, the imperative to provide energy at affordable rates to our 1.4 billion people," he mentioned. India has said in the recent past that the country's im-



port policy for oil and gas is guided entirely by the interests of the

Indian consumers amid a volatile global energy market. (IANS)



Ambani Seeking US Approvals To Import Venezuelan Oil

India-West News Desk

WASHINGTON, DC – Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Industries is actively pursuing U.S. approval to restart imports of Venezuelan crude oil as geopolitical pressures reshape global energy trade.

Reliance, which operates the world's largest refining complex in Gujarat, has been in discussions with the U.S. State and Treasury Departments to secure the necessary authorization to resume purchases of

Venezuelan oil under Washington's regulatory framework. This initiative comes because of heightened U.S. pressure on New Delhi to reduce imports of Russian crude oil and explore alternative sources.

Sources familiar with the situation told Reuters that Reliance representatives are working to obtain clearance from U.S. authorities that would allow the Indian conglomerate to import Venezuelan barrels again, potentially helping offset declining Russian supplies.

The move follows a period in 2025 when Reliance received U.S. licenses to bring Venezuelan crude to its refineries, receiving roughly 63,000 barrels per day before most of those authorizations were suspended and Washington threatened buyers with tariffs.

Reliance has indicated it would consider resuming Venezuelan crude purchases if allowed to buy under the current U.S. regulatory conditions, including through U.S.-approved channels or for non-U.S. buyers.

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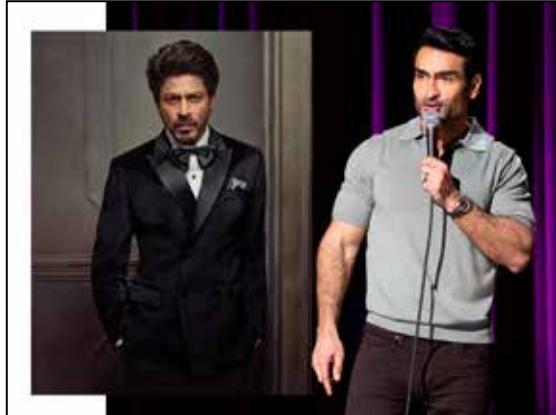
ENTERTAINMENT

Kumail Nanjiani Says Shah Rukh Khan Is God

India-West News Desk

LOS ANGELES, CA – Actor-comedian Kumail Nanjiani has spoken about the cultural scale of Indian cinema, calling Shah Rukh Khan “beyond a movie star” during a conversation with fellow comedian Hasan Minhaj on Minhaj’s YouTube channel.

The discussion, held as Nanjiani promoted his new stand-up special ‘Night Thoughts’, began with Minhaj posing a direct comparison: who is the bigger movie star, Shah Rukh Khan or Tom Cruise? Nanjiani responded, “Shah Rukh Khan is a God; he is not a movie star,” drawing a distinction between celebrity culture



in India and Hollywood stardom.

Explaining his view, Nanjiani said the comparison overlooks a larger cultural context. He pointed to Khan’s command over language

and public image, arguing that the Bollywood icon’s humility amplifies his stature. Referring to interviews, Nanjiani said Cruise projects a traditional movie-star persona, while Khan often downplays

his fame. “He’ll come out and say, ‘Oh, I’m nothing.’ Obviously, he knows that’s not true, but he’s so confident in who he is that he actively downplays it,” Nanjiani said.

The conversation then turned to Khan’s career choices. Nanjiani noted that, as a leading man, Khan took on morally complex or negative roles early in his career, citing performances such as ‘Darr’ and ‘Anjaam’. “He was one of the first lead actors to play complicated bad guys,” he said, describing the move as unusual for a mainstream star at the time. Nanjiani also contrasted Indian and American relationships

with cinema. He said films in India occupy a central cultural space that the US has never experienced. “What movies are to India, they are not to people here,” he said, adding that in India, movie stars are often treated with reverence. He described the traditional Bollywood “masala” film as an all-in-one experience combining action, drama, romance, comedy, and music, often running several hours.

Deepika-Ranveer Enjoy Las Vegas Concert

LOS ANGELES, CA – Bollywood superstar Deepika Padukone celebrated the holiday season in the US alongside her husband, Ranveer Singh. While the couple has been enjoying their time together, Deepika recently crossed a major item off her bucket list by attending a Backstreet Boys concert in Las Vegas.

The musical outing came to light after the actor’s friend, Sneha Ramachander, posted a photo from the event. The image captures the duo smiling in front of a vibrant,



crowded venue, with Deepika opting for a casual look in a simple white T-shirt and jeans. The post quickly gained traction online, sparking nostalgia among millennial fans of the iconic boy band.

Beyond the concert, the star

couple has been frequently spotted by fans while vacationing in New York, where they have been seen taking selfies with admirers. A highlight of their trip included a visit to “Bungalow,” the New York restaurant. In a special tribute to Indian traditions and Ranveer’s career, the couple participated in making ‘modaks’ at the establishment.

This getaway follows a massive year for Ranveer Singh, whose film ‘Dhurandhar’, directed by Aditya Dhar, has become one of 2025’s biggest hits. (ANI)

‘Homebound’ Team In Palm Springs

By PREETI CHANDAN

PALM SPRINGS, CA – The

37th annual Palm Springs International Film Festival is officially underway, and the buzz is building for ‘Homebound,’ the latest feature from director Neeraj Ghaywan.

Actor Ishaan Khatter, the makers, and others associated with the film that has been shortlisted for the Oscars 2026, are also in town to promote it.



category, the film follows the journey of two childhood friends navigating the complexities of hope and social mobility.

The film had three scheduled screenings, which took place on January 4, 5 and 9 around the city.

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HOLLYWOOD

Leonardo DiCaprio Has A Sikh Stepmom, And Indians Can't Get Enough Of It



India-West News Desk

LOS ANGELES, CA – A serene, turbaned woman occasionally seen beside Leonardo DiCaprio at major public events has long sparked curiosity among fans. That woman is Peggy Ann Farrar, DiCaprio's stepmother, whose life represents a unique bridge between Hollywood high society and a deeply committed Sikh faith.

The connection recently drew international attention after DiCaprio discussed his family's unconventional roots in an interview with Time magazine. Reflecting on his upbringing, the actor casually noted, "My stepmother is a Sikh." He added, "My father is from the sort of hippie counterculture... he hung out with a lot of the underground art movement in Los Angeles of the '70s."

Indians of all faiths can't get enough of this information. Headlines have run in media across news outlets, and social media exploded when someone read his interview and posted it breathlessly online!

Farrar is an 'Amritdhari' Sikh, meaning she has formally committed to a disciplined spiritual path. This commitment includes daily prayers, no alcohol, and a lifelong focus on 'seva.' While she embraced the faith decades ago, she began wearing a turban more prominently in recent years, often pairing it with traditional Indian clothing.

Leonardo was born to George DiCaprio and Irmelin Indenbirken, who separated when he was a toddler. George married Peggy in 1995. Over the last 30 years, she has been a steady figure in the

actor's private circle, often accompanying the family to the Oscars and other industry milestones.

A humorous moment illustrating the family's distinctive style occurred during the filming of 'Once Upon a Time in Hollywood'. DiCaprio recalled that when George and Peggy visited the set, co-star Brad Pitt initially refused to believe they were his parents.

Pointing them out near the famous Musso & Frank Grill, DiCaprio remembered Pitt repeatedly responding with a skeptical "Yeah, right!" because they blended so perfectly into the film's 1960s-era aesthetic. "I know they look like extras in this movie, but that's really them," DiCaprio told him. "That's how they dress every day." (with social and news media inputs)

Golden Globes: Priyanka Chopra Presents Best Actor Award To Noah Wyle

LOS ANGELES, CA – Priyanka Chopra Jonas and husband Nick Jonas brought red-carpet energy to the 2026 Golden Globe Awards, arriving in coordinated looks that drew attention from fans. Chopra Jonas wore a navy-blue gown accented with diamond jewelry, while Jonas opted for a classic black suit, as they entered the Beverly Hilton.

Priyanka also participated in the program as a presenter. Teaming with Blackpink member Lalisa Manobal, she introduced the nominees for Best Actor in a Television Drama and presented the award to Noah Wyle for his performance in the medical drama series 'The Pitt'.

The night balanced Hollywood glamour with creative recognition, and Chopra Jonas managed both worlds comfortably – first on the red carpet and later onstage.

On the professional front, Chopra will next be seen in 'The Bluff', set to premiere on Prime Video on February 25. (ANI)



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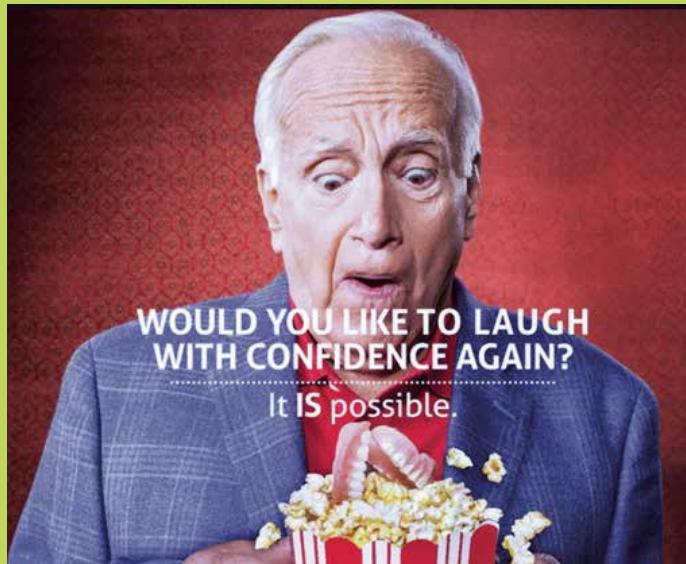
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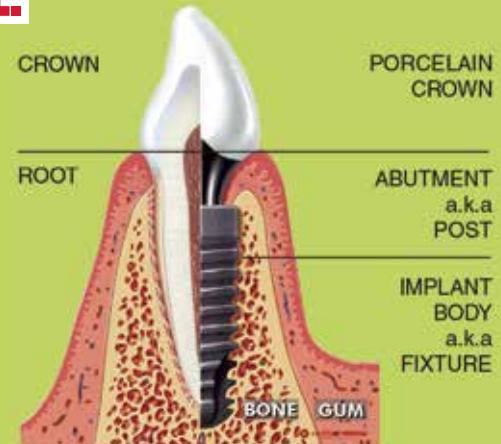


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Zohran Spotlights Assam's Ahimsa Silk In Global Fashion Statement

India-West News Desk

NEW YORK, NY – Zohran Mamdani's New Year's Day swearing in as New York City's mayor carried a quiet fashion statement with global resonance. Beneath the expected uniform of a black overcoat and crisp white shirt was a detail that spoke softly but powerfully: a gold embroidered tie made from eri silk, a textile rooted in the craft traditions of Assam.

The tie was created by Kartik Research, a Delhi-based menswear label founded in 2021 by designer Kartik Kumra. The brand has built a reputation for translating Indian textile heritage into modern menswear. For Mamdani's historic moment, Kartik Research selected eri silk sourced directly from Assam.

Eri silk, often called ahimsa silk, is produced primarily in Assam, with smaller centers in Meghalaya and Nagaland. The craft sustains thousands of rural households. Along with pat, muga, and tussar, eri is one of the four traditional silks of Assam, deeply embedded in the region's cultural and economic fabric.

What sets eri silk apart is not just its origin, but its process. The fiber is spun from the cocoon of the samia ricini silkworm. Unlike conventional silk production, the eri cocoon remains open at one end, allowing the moth to emerge naturally before the fiber is harvested. This practice permits the silkworm to complete its life cycle, giving eri silk its ethical standing within sericulture.

Breathable yet insulating, washable, wrinkle resistant and naturally hypoallergenic, the fabric softens over time, developing character with use. These qualities have made it versatile across garments, from shawls and jackets to tailored pieces and home textiles.

In 2024, it received Oeko Tex certification from Germany, confirming its compliance with international standards for environmentally safe and responsible textile production.



'Stranger Things' Creative Vision Inspired By Shyamalan

India-West News Desk

LOS ANGELES, CA – M. Night Shyamalan may not be part of the 'Stranger Things' writers room, but his influence is on the creative DNA say its creators. As the Duffer Brothers gear up for the fifth and final season of Netflix's blockbuster series, they are openly crediting Shyamalan as one of the storytellers who shaped their instincts.

In a new conversation with Variety, Matt Duffer said that watching Shyamalan's career – particularly how he bounced back from a misfire to deliver the cultural earthquake that was 'The Sixth Sense' – helped define their own appetite for risk and originality.

Matt said Shyamalan's refusal to abandon

bold, self-driven storytelling made a deep impression. The brothers grew up on his films, absorbing his mix of suspense, emotional stakes, and the uncanny. Those qualities, they say, became part of the creative framework that eventually evolved into 'Stranger Things'. The Duffers have cited their other influence has being HBO's 'Game of Thrones.'

Prada To Release Kolhapuri Chappal Collection Next Year



NAGPUR- Global luxury brand Prada, on December 11, signed a pivotal MoU with two Maharashtra government undertakings, LIDCOM (Sant Rohidas Charmudyog and Charmakar Vikas Mahamandal) and LIDCAR (Dr. Babu Jagjivanram Charmudyog Vikas Mahamandal), to take the rich legacy of the Kolhapuri chappal to the world.

The agreement was officially signed at the Italian Consulate in Mumbai during the Italy-India Business Council meeting. This collaboration is set to develop footwear that integrates traditional, centuries-old manufacturing methods with Prada's modern and contemporary design aesthetics.

The footwear will be made in India by skilled traditional Kolhapuri chappal artisans from Maharashtra and Karnataka.

The collection is scheduled for release in February 2026 and will be available across 40 Prada outlets globally, as well as on its official website.

Kolhapuri chappals, which received the GI tag in 2019, cementing their authenticity and cultural importance, are traditionally crafted in eight districts across two states: Kolhapur, Sangli, Satara, Solapur in Maharashtra, and Belagavi, Bagalkot, Dharwad, Bijapur in Karnataka. (IANS)

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MUSIC

'Bhajan Clubbing' Is Gen Z's New Way Of Finding The Divine



CHENNAI -Oscar winner and one of India's finest music directors, A R Rahman, is set to make his acting debut in director Manoj N S's upcoming film 'Moonwalk', which features Prabhudeva in the lead.

The makers of the film, produced by Behindwoods Productions, recently unveiled 14-character posters, significantly adding to the growing anticipation around the project.

For the first time in his legendary career, A R Rahman has sung all five songs in 'Moonwalk', lending a unified musical voice to the soundtrack. More notably, the film also marks Rahman's much-awaited acting debut, in which the Oscar-winning composer will be seen playing a fictional "angry young film director", and not himself as a music director, adding a unique meta-layer to the narrative.

Speaking about this special collaboration, director Manoj N S said, "It

was a wonderful experience shooting the song 'Mayile' with Prabhudeva sir and A R Rahman sir. The song has turned out very well and is sure to be a feast for movie lovers in the theatres. Prabhudeva sir has delivered one of his best dance performances for this song, and I sincerely thank choreographer Sekhar Master for making it truly special."

He added, "A R Rahman sir appears throughout the song, adding a cute charm and a very special vibe to it. When I later presented an extended role to him after the song, he graciously accepted it. This will be a surprise scene for movie lovers, and I thoroughly enjoyed directing him in his first-ever movie scene. I am deeply grateful to him for supporting our project 'Moonwalk' wholeheartedly right from day one. The entire set was filled with happiness seeing ARR sir having fun as an actor. It will be a scene people will not expect."

Equally noteworthy is Prabhudeva's presence in a multifaceted avatar. Widely regarded as one of Indian cinema's most influential performers, choreographers and filmmakers, he will be seen playing 'Babooty', a young film choreographer. The role is said to blend performance and humour, making it one of the most intriguing characters in the film.

The makers plan to release the full-length comedy feature in theatres in May 2026. (IANS)



By Sandeep Khurana

Devotion, it seems, is finding a new address.

It may be a café, a college courtyard, a rooftop, or an open air venue glowing with soft lights and incense. The sound is familiar yet unexpected. Ancient bhajans rise over electronic beats, tablas pulse alongside synths, and a young crowd sings along with closed eyes and raised hands.

This is bhajan clubbing, and Gen Z has made it their own.

What surprises many is not just the popularity of these gatherings, but who is driving them. Gen Z, often seen as hyper digital and globally influenced, is at the center of a revival of devotional music. Instead of turning away from tradition, they are reshaping it into something immersive, social, and deeply emotional. For them, spirituality is no longer confined to temples or formal settings. It is something to be felt, shared, and

lived in the moment.

Bhajan clubbing works because it speaks the language this generation understands. The music is repetitive and hypnotic, building a rhythm that feels almost trance like. Familiar devotional lyrics are layered with modern soundscapes, creating an atmosphere that feels both sacred and celebratory. It is not about rules or rituals. It is about experience. Young people come for the music, stay for the feeling, and leave with a sense of grounding that is hard to find elsewhere.

The settings play a big role too.

Unlike traditional bhajan sessions, these events happen in relaxed, contemporary spaces. DJs and musicians remix classical bhajans live, blending harmonium, mridangam, and tabla with electronic music. The result is a sound that respects tradition without being trapped by it, making devotional music approachable even for those who may not have grown up with it.

There is also a strong wellness element at play.

Many Gen Z listeners are navigating burnout, anxiety, and constant digital noise. Bhajan clubbing offers a kind of emotional release. The collective singing, steady beats, and devotional words create a calm that feels similar to meditation. For many, it is less a concert and more a reset. A place to breathe, slow down,

and reconnect.

Visually, these events are carefully crafted.

Ambient lighting, ethnic clothing, and thoughtfully designed stages turn bhajan clubbing into an experience that is both meaningful and

beautiful. It fits naturally into Gen Z's world, where moments are shared online and aesthetics matter. Yet the visuals are not empty. They enhance the mood and draw people deeper into the music and its meaning.

Another quiet shift is happening alongside this trend. Many young people are moving away from alcohol centered nightlife. Bhajan clubbing offers the same sense of collective high through rhythm, devotion, and shared energy, without the excess. It reflects a changing idea of fun, one that values clarity, connection, and presence.

At its heart, bhajan clubbing is also about cultural pride. By embracing devotional music in a modern form, Gen Z is reclaiming tradition on its own terms. They are not rejecting the past. They are reintroducing it, making it relevant to their lives today. In doing so, they challenge the idea that youth and tradition cannot coexist.

Bhajan clubbing is no passing fad. It is a reflection of how a new generation is redefining spirituality, not as something distant or rigid, but as something alive, inclusive, and joyful.

(Khurana is a California based music composer and filmmaker who has produced music across genres, including bhajan healing music, music for reiki and meditation, yoga music, and sacred chant symphonies.)

Family Unveils Zubeen Garg Trust, Seeks Legacy Preservation

GUWAHATI-Garima Garg, wife of late Zubeen Garg, on January 2 announced the formation of a trust in the name of the cultural icon of Assam to preserve and carry forward his artistic, social and cultural legacy.

This came even as the family reiterated their hope for the early delivery of justice in the case related to his death.

As part of the initiative, the family's property at Kharghuli will be handed over to the trust to serve as a center for social, cultural and creative activities that were close to the late icon's heart.

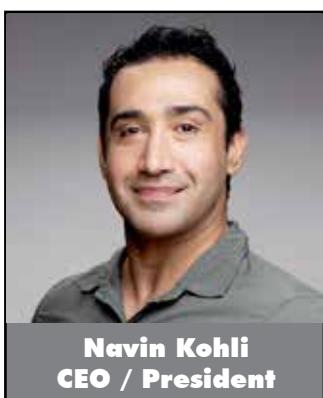
According to the family, the trust will operate through three dedicated wings. The Kalaguru

Foundation will focus on socio-cultural initiatives, while Abhinaya Performing Arts — an institution earlier founded by Zubeen Garg in his sister's name — will work to promote theatre and performance arts, particularly among young people.

A separate research wing will document and study Zubeen Garg's life, creative works and his contributions to Assam's cultural and social landscape, including the preservation of his intellectual property.

The family also said the trust will focus on public health and welfare, noting that health camps have already been organized in remote areas in Zubeen Garg's name. (IANS)

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MUSIC

Ganavya's Musical, Meditative Reimagining Of Marathi Prayer Earns Obama Nod

India-West News Desk

LOS ANGELES, CA – Former President Barack Obama's year end culture list has given a global spotlight to Ganavya Doraiswamy, placing the artist at the center of one of music's most watched endorsements.

"As 2025 comes to a close, I'm continuing a tradition that I started during my time in the White House: sharing my annual lists of favorite books, movies, and music. I hope you find something new to enjoy — and please send any recommendations for me to check out!" Obama wrote while unveiling his favorites.

Among the songs he highlighted this year was "Pasayadan" by Ganavya, a meditative reimagining of a traditional Marathi prayer. The pick situates her alongside some of the world's biggest names, including Kendrick Lamar and Lady Gaga and introduces a wide audience to an artist whose work often lives at the intersection of devotion, experiment, and community.

Born in 1991, Ganavya Doraiswamy is a Tamil Nadu born, New York raised and California based vocalist, composer, and

multidisciplinary artist. Her music draws deeply from South Indian classical and folk traditions while engaging jazz, experimental forms, and contemporary production. Her voice has been described as both lullaby and lightning bolt, carrying prayer like intimacy alongside improvisational daring.

Ganavya's path to music was unconventional. She was homeschooled for parts of her childhood to prioritize arts training, then earned undergraduate degrees in theater and psychology from Florida International University at the age of 19.

She briefly worked as a rehabilitation counselor at the Everglades Correctional Institution in Florida before turning fully to music, completing a graduate degree at Berklee College of Music. After graduating, she taught South Asian music at Berklee Valencia.

Ganavya holds a graduate degree in ethnomusicology from UCLA and a PhD in creative practice and critical inquiry from Harvard University. At Harvard, she helped lead the Songwrights Apothecary Lab, an experimental music research space founded by Esperanza Spalding. Her

dissertation committee included Spalding and Claire Chase, with theater director Peter Sellars also among her advisors. She is also a co-founder of the We Have Voice Collective.

Her recorded output reflects the same breadth. In 2015, she recorded 'Aikyam Onnu,' translating jazz standards and abhangs into Tamil. The album was released in 2018. 2024 saw the release of 'Daughter of a Temple,' recorded during a week long gathering at the Moores Opera House with more than 40 musicians including Esperanza Spalding, Wayne Shorter, Vijay Iyer, Shabaka Hutchings, and

Rasika Shekar. The album went on to be named BBC 6 Music's Best Album of the Year and one of The Guardian's best albums of the year.

Her most recent album, 'Nilam,' released in 2025, features vocals in Tamil, English, and Old



Marathi. A track from that album, "Pasayadan," is the song that caught Obama's attention. Nilam was also named Songlines Album of the Year.

Ganavya has appeared as a solo vocalist on multiple Grammy award winning projects and

penned and performed the first Tamil lyrics to win a Latin Grammy, for Residente's 'Antes Que El Mundo Se Acabe.' Her long running collaboration with Peter Sellars recently led to the co-creation of an opera titled 'Nine Jewelled Deer.'

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India-West News Desk

SAN FRANCISCO, CA – Bollywood spectacle met American sports culture on a December night in San Francisco when the thumping title track of Ranveer Singh's blockbuster film 'Dhurandhar' echoed through an NBA arena.

During halftime at the Golden State Warriors versus Minnesota Timberwolves game on December 12, 2025, the Chase Center floor transformed into a vibrant celebration of Punjabi rhythm and movement.

At the heart of the moment was Bhangra Empire, a Bay Area collective known for bringing traditional Punjabi dance into unexpected public spaces. As the music swelled, dancers in bright, traditional attire filled the court, deliver-

ing tightly synchronized choreography that blended folk energy with arena scale drama.

The track itself carries the swagger and cinematic pulse that made 'Dhurandhar' a mega hit. Composed by Shashwat Sachdev, the song features vocals by Hanumankind and Jasmine Sandlas, fusing contemporary sound with deep roots in Punjabi musical tradition. That fusion translated seamlessly to the halftime stage, where the beat-driven composition matched the athletic intensity of the NBA setting.

Bhangra Empire, founded in 2006, brings together students and working professionals united by a shared commitment to showcasing Punjabi culture on a global platform. Since 2009, they have also taught Bhangra classes across the Bay Area.

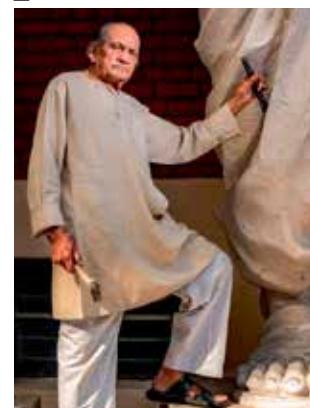
Ram Sutar, 'Statue of Unity' Sculptor, Dies At 100

NEW DELHI – Renowned sculptor Ram Vanji Sutar, whose artistic vision gave form to the Statue of Unity in Gujarat and shaped the visual identity of modern India, passed away at his residence in Noida. He was 100. Family sources said he died of age-related ailments, marking the end of a defining chapter in Indian monumental art.

Condolences poured in from across the country. President Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid tribute, describing Sutar as an artist whose creations immortalised India's history and values. Cultural institutions and leaders called his death an irreparable loss to the nation's artistic heritage. Sutar is survived by his family and a legacy that continues to enrich India's public spaces.

Born on February 19, 1925, in Gondur village of Dhule district, Maharashtra, Sutar rose from humble beginnings to become one of India's most influential public sculptors. A gold medallist from the Sir J.J. School of Art in Mumbai, he dedicated over seven decades to sculpting figures that embodied India's political, cultural, and historical consciousness.

His most celebrated work, the Statue of Unity, stands 182 metres tall in Kevadia, Gujarat, making it the tallest statue in the world. As chief sculptor and conceptual designer, Sutar translated Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's role as India's unifier into a form combin-



ing authority, realism, and restraint. Patel's forward-moving stance, carefully detailed facial expression, and attire reflect leadership and resolve, avoiding aggression while projecting firmness.

Despite the unprecedented scale, Sutar personally oversaw the artistic detailing, working with engineers and designers to ensure proportional accuracy and human expression. His involvement continued into his 90s, reflecting a lifelong commitment to craftsmanship. Inaugurated in 2018, the Statue of Unity has become a symbol of national pride and a major tourism hub, while serving as the artistic culmination of Sutar's career.

Beyond the Statue of Unity, Sutar's sculptures occupy prominent public spaces across India and abroad. His works include the iconic Mahatma Gandhi statue outside the Indian Parliament, the equestrian statue of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj at Parliament House, and statues of leaders such as B.R. Ambedkar and V.D. Savarkar. Known for dignity, balance, and emotional restraint, his sculptures command presence without exaggeration.

For his contributions, Sutar received numerous honors, including the Padma Shri in 1999, the Padma Bhushan in 2016, and Maharashtra's highest civilian award, the Maharashtra Bhushan, recognizing his lifetime achievement in public art. (IANS)

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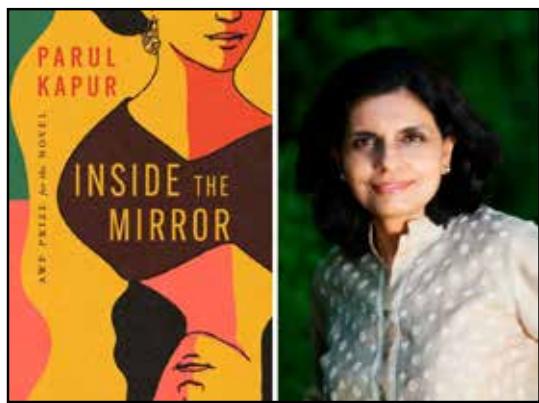
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Parul Kapur Wins \$25,000 Patti Family Foundation Book Award

India-West Staff Reporter

NEW YORK, NY – In a year crowded with notable debuts, Parul Kapur's 'Inside the Mirror' has quietly emerged as one of the celebrated literary novels of 2025, earning the Patti Family Foundation Creative Arts Book Award and placing its author among a growing list of writers to watch.



Announced in Interlochen, Michigan, the honor comes with a \$25,000 cash prize and a writer in residence appointment at the Interlochen Center for the Arts, a setting long associated with nurturing creative talent.

Born in Assam and raised in the United States, Kapur brings a transnational perspective to her fiction.

'Inside the Mirror,' published in March 2024 by the University of Nebraska Press, is set in Bombay in the 1950s, a decade shaped by both optimism and upheaval in the years following Indian Independence. At its center are twin sisters bound by family and tradition but driven by different artistic callings, one to painting and the other to classical dance. As the city and the nation around them shift under the weight of social change, the sisters navigate ambition, loyalty, and

the limits imposed on women seeking creative freedom in a transforming society.

The novel's careful rendering of its historical moment has been central to its reception.

In announcing the Patti Family Foundation award, selection committee chair Eric Blackburn said the judges were struck by the book's accomplished approach to historical setting and its insistence on the cen-

trality of artistic expression to individuals, communities, and even nations.

The novel has received starred reviews from Publishers Weekly and Booklist, while The Atlanta Journal Constitution praised it as packed with rich characters and attuned to the shifting cultural landscape of post Independence India.

As part of the award, Kapur will spend three days in April 2026 as writer in residence at the Interlochen Arts Academy. Interlochen President Trey Devey said the residency offers young writers and artists an opportunity to see how creative ideas are developed and refined into finished literary work, a process Kapur herself has navigated with notable success. Kapur holds a master of fine arts degree from Columbia University and lives in Atlanta.

Photos: Vino Wong

Kiran Desai, Arundhati Roy On NYT's Best Of The Year List

India-West News Desk

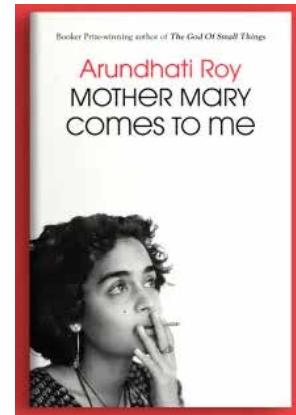
NEW YORK, NY – The New York Times Book Review has unveiled its weighty and much anticipated year end list, naming the editors' top five fiction and top five nonfiction books of the year. As always, the list serves as a literary barometer, spotlighting works that combine ambition, craft and emotional force.

Among the ten selections, two books by celebrated Indian authors stand out for their scope and intimacy: Kiran Desai's 'The Loneliness of Sonia and Sunny' in fiction, and Arundhati Roy's 'Mother Mary Comes to Me' in nonfiction.

'The Loneliness of Sonia and Sunny' marks a major return for Kiran Desai. The New York Times praised the novel in rapturous terms, placing it firmly among the year's finest noting, "Like the richest 19th-century fiction, this nearly 700-page family saga had our critic Alexandra Jacobs swooning: 'Crowded but never claustrophobic,' she wrote, and 'better company than real-life people.'"

Desai, who left India at 14 and later lived in England before moving to the United States, brings her own transnational experience to the novel. The daughter of acclaimed author Anita Desai, she studied creative writing at Bennington College, Hollins University and Columbia University.

In nonfiction, Arundhati Roy's 'Mother



Mary Comes to Me' earned its place on the Times list as a memoir of striking emotional honesty. The New York Times described it as follows: "In this unsparing yet darkly funny memoir, the prizewinning novelist captures the fierce, asthmatic, impossible, inspirational woman who shaped her as a writer and an activist – and left her emotionally bruised for a lifetime. Roy doesn't let

herself off too easily, however. Fleeing from an insular Indian community to the cosmopolitan Delhi and then the global stage, she – like her mother – is imperious, impatient and unforgettable."

The book traces Roy's complex and often painful relationship with her mother, Mary Roy, whom she describes as both "my shelter and my storm." Writing in the aftermath of her mother's death in September 2022, Roy confronts the intensity of her grief and her long history of running away, not out of a lack of love, but to preserve it. The memoir moves from her childhood in Kerala, where her single mother founded a school, through Roy's emergence as a novelist and essayist, and into the present day. At once raw, unsettling and unexpectedly funny, the book carries the scale and depth of her novels and the political clarity and warmth of her essays, offering an ode to freedom and to the fierce, thorny bonds between mothers and daughters.

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New US Childhood Immunization Guidelines Trims Vaccine List

WASHINGTON, DC – The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has adopted a revised US childhood immunization schedule that reduces the number of vaccines recommended for all children, following a federal review comparing American practices with those of other developed nations, a move President Donald Trump described as a major overhaul of public health policy.

The change was formalized through a decision memorandum signed by Acting CDC Director Jim O'Neill. "The data support a more focused schedule that protects children from the most serious infectious diseases while improving clarity, adherence, and public confidence," O'Neill said.

President Trump posted on January 5, "Effective today, America will no longer require 72 'jabs' for our beautiful, healthy children." Trump said children will now be recommended vaccinations for "11 of the most serious and dangerous diseases," calling the revised framework "a far more reasonable Schedule."

Under the updated framework, the CDC will continue to organize childhood immunizations into three categories: vaccines recommended for all children, vaccines recommended for certain high-risk groups or populations, and vaccines administered based on shared clinical decision-making between physicians and families.

Vaccines recommended for all children

will include those for measles, mumps, rubella, polio, pertussis, tetanus, diphtheria, Haemophilus influenzae type B, pneumococcal disease, human papillomavirus, and varicella, or chickenpox.

"All vaccines currently recommended by CDC will remain covered by insurance without cost sharing," Mehmet Oz, Administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, said. "No family will lose access."

Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. said the review was prompted by international comparisons and declining public trust.

The decision drew sharp criticism from Democratic lawmakers. Senate Finance Committee Ranking Member Ron Wyden said, "The US is currently experiencing the highest rate of measles in the 21st century. Robert Kennedy, with Trump's blessing, is leading the country down a tragic path where more children die from preventable diseases."

Senator Kirsten Gillibrand said the revised schedule removes key protections. "Once again, the Trump administration is putting pseudoscience and extremism over the health and safety of our children," Gillibrand said. "This decision will endanger our children and make America sicker."

Congressman Kim Schrier, a pediatrician, said, "As a pediatrician, I am outraged by RFK Jr.'s radical and dangerous decision to make sweeping changes to our nation's childhood immunization schedule." (IANS)

Clinical Trial Links Yoga To Faster Opioid Withdrawal Recovery



NEW DELHI- Yoga can aid in the speedy recovery of people with opioid withdrawal, as well as improve anxiety, sleep, and pain in them, according to a study.

Opioid withdrawal involves physical symptoms like diarrhea, insomnia, fever, pain, anxiety, and depression, and autonomic signs such as pupil dilation, runny nose, goosebumps, anorexia, yawning, nausea, vomiting, and sweating. These symptoms result from sympathetic nervous system overactivity due to dysregulated noradrenergic outflow.

The study led by researchers from the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences Bengaluru, and Harvard Medical School, calls for integrating yoga into withdrawal protocols as a neurobiologically

informed intervention. They noted that yoga will help address core regulatory processes beyond symptom management.

In 2022, an estimated 60 million people worldwide used opioids non-medically, yet only 1 in 11 individuals with drug use disorders received treatment. In India, a 2019 national survey indicated

a 2.1 per cent prevalence of opioid use.

Opioid withdrawal involves sympathetic hyperactivity and reduced parasympathetic tone, which standard pharmacological treatments may not adequately address, contributing to relapse vulnerability.

To evaluate yoga as an adjuvant therapy to accelerate opioid withdrawal recovery, the team conducted a randomized clinical trial of 59 male participants (30 yoga and 29 control participants) with opioid use disorder.

The participants who received yoga alongside standard buprenorphine treatment achieved withdrawal stabilization 4.4 times faster than controls. They also showed significant improvements in heart rate variability, anxiety, sleep, and pain measures. (IANS)

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FOOD

New Food Pyramid Has More Meat, Fat, Protein; Less Sugar, Alcohol



India-West News Desk

WASHINGTON, DC – The newly released Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2025 to 2030, call on Americans to base their diets on whole, minimally processed foods, prioritizing protein at every meal, consuming full fat dairy without added sugars, eating vegetables and fruits throughout the day in whole forms, incorporating healthy fats from foods such as meat, seafood, eggs, nuts, seeds, olives and avoca-

dos, and focusing on whole grains while sharply reducing refined carbohydrates. The guidelines also advise limiting highly processed foods, added sugars and artificial additives, choosing portion sizes appropriate for age, sex and activity level, drinking water and other unsweetened beverages for hydration, and limiting alcohol consumption.

The guidelines were released on January 7 by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Agricul-

ture. Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins described the update as a major reset of federal nutrition policy, with food positioned as the foundation of health.

Federal officials said the changes are aimed at addressing a growing national health crisis. Nearly 90 percent of U.S. health care spending is directed toward treating chronic disease, much of it linked to diet and lifestyle. More than 70 percent of American adults are overweight or obese, and nearly one in three adolescents has prediabetes. Diet related health conditions are also increasingly disqualifying young Americans from military service, raising concerns about long term national readiness.

Kennedy said the guidelines are intended to return Americans to basic principles of nutrition by emphasizing whole, nutrient dense foods and reducing reliance on highly processed products. Rollins said the recommendations also realign federal nutrition policy to support U.S. farmers and ranchers by encouraging consumption of foods produced within the domestic food system.

In addition to guidance for the

general population, the 2025 to 2030 guidelines include tailored recommendations for infants and children, adolescents, pregnant and lactating women, older adults, individuals with chronic disease, and those following vegetarian or vegan diets. Officials said these targeted recommendations are

designed to ensure adequate nutrition across all stages of life.

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans are updated every five years and are used to guide federal nutrition programs, public health initiatives, and dietary standards in schools and other institutions nationwide.

US Makhana Prices Double With Tariffs



LOS ANGELES, CA – A pack of foxnuts (Makhana) weighing about 25 grams, which used to cost \$2, has doubled to \$4 in recent months in the US, due to tariffs squeezing household budgets, a report has said. The 50 percent tariffs on Indian imports have hit sales, with exporters to the US seeing shipments slump by as much as 40 percent.

Indian fox nut exporters, however, have found alternate markets. Al Jazeera cited a Denver-based leather garment trader, originally hailing from Kolkata, saying that his monthly grocery budget rose to \$900 from \$500 before the pandemic, specifically mentioning the price rise in fox nuts or Makhana.

Foxnut exporters are exploring demand from new markets, like Spain and South Africa, driven by the Indian diaspora and awareness of the health benefits of foxnuts. India exported about 800 metric tons of fox nuts in 2024–25 to markets including Germany, (IANS)

China, the US, and the Middle East, with the US accounting for half of those exports.

The sector is limited to the Indian diaspora in the international market. There is a need to spread more awareness about it both domestically and abroad, according to Satyajit Singh, whose company, Shakti Sudha Agro Ventures, controls half of India's total exports of the health food.

India is the largest producer of makhana in the world, accounting for nearly 80 percent of global production. Bihar remains the backbone of the country's makhana output, contributing around 85 percent of national production, with Darbhanga one of the key hubs for cultivation and processing. (IANS)

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India Cracks Down On Misleading Herbal Tea Branding



NEW DELHI-India's food safety regulator has tightened the rules on what can be officially called "tea", making it clear that only products made from the plant *Camellia sinensis* can use the word on their labels.

In a directive, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) said that many food business operators are wrongly using the term "tea" for herbal infusions and plant-based drinks that are not made from *Camellia sinensis*. According to the regulator, this practice is misleading consumers and amounts to misbranding.

The FSSAI said it found several products in the market being sold as "Rooibos tea", "herbal tea" and "flower tea", even though these beverages are not derived from the tea plant. The authority clarified that such products do not meet the legal definition of tea and therefore cannot be marketed using that name. As per existing regulations, only infusions made from *Camellia sinensis* qualify as tea. This includes well-known varieties such as green tea, Kangra tea and instant tea. Any drink made from other plants, herbs or flowers does not fall under this category.

The regulator has warned all food business operators, to stop using the word "tea" directly or indirectly for products that are not derived from *Camellia sinensis*. Failure to comply, it said, will be treated as a violation of food safety laws. (IANS)



Chef Kunal Kapur: No Food Is Inherently Unhealthy

NEW DELHI - chef Kunal Kapur, who is on the new season of "MasterChef India", believes the frenzy around social media food trends often confuses people more than it helps them.

Talking about how social media confuses people about snacking on healthy and unhealthy food, Kunal said, "What has happened is that everyone is consuming social media at a very rapid pace and continuously."

"Food is one of those verticals that constantly appears on your social media feed, with people claiming that certain foods are healthy, others are not, that a particular food suits you, or that a specific ingredient is a 'superfood'. Some of

these claims are true, while others cannot really be vouched for."

For Kunal, health isn't just about what you eat.

"But there is a simple principle you need to understand: health is not just a function of what you eat, it also depends on how you eat, how you cook your food, when you eat it, and in what quantity."

"Additionally, your body type may be better suited for certain dishes, and eating the same food as someone with a different body type may not be ideal."

The celebrity chef also emphasized that no food should be considered unhealthy.

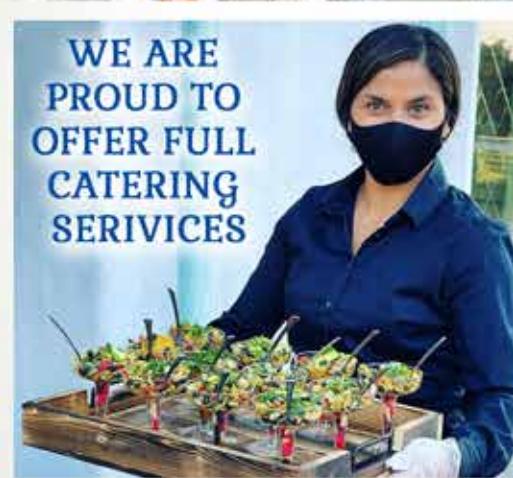
The chef blames it on lifestyle choices. "What makes food un-

healthy is our lifestyle choices. If we have a sedentary lifestyle, don't move much, and don't burn calories, then calorie-dense foods may not be good for us."

Kunal encouraged people to experiment with recipes they see online, but to always judge for themselves what works.

"So, unless you have a specific body condition that restricts certain foods, all foods can be healthy. You just need to remember this equation: you have to burn what you eat, and that is key to healthy living."

"Try out what you see on social media, and then share your reaction in the comments on whether it was right or wrong for others to follow," he added. (IANS)



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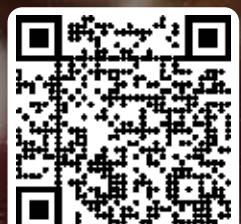
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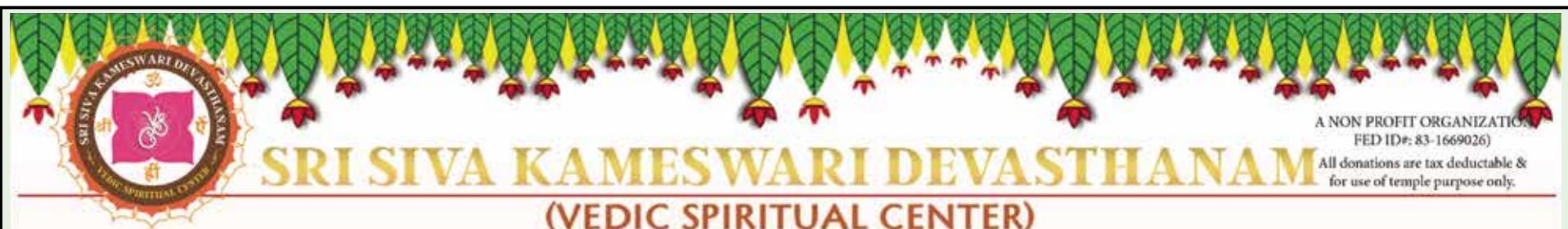
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Shyamala Avarana Puja by Sri T V Krishna Murthy (Sri Chakreswari Mission)

FRI 23RD JAN, 2026

08:00 AM	Kalasha Sthapana, Mandaparadhana
09:00 AM - 12:00 PM	Shyamala Avarana Puja
10:30 AM	Vasanta Panchami Goddess Saraswati Abhishekam
05:00 PM - 07:00 PM	Deepa Prajwalana, Sangeeta Seva Yajña
06:30 PM - 07:00 PM	Samooohika Aksharabhyasam
07:00 PM - 08:30 PM	Goddess Kameswari Abhishekam & Shyamala Sahasra Kumkumarchana (Participatory Puja by devotees)
08:30 PM	Aarati and Dinner prasad

SAT 24TH JAN, 2026

08:00 AM - 10:00 AM	Shyamala Avarana Puja
10:00 AM	Deepa Prajwalana
10:00 AM - 01:00 PM	Sangeeta Seva Yajña
01:00 PM - 01:30 PM	Lunch Prasad
01:30 PM - 07:00 PM	Sangeeta Seva Yajña
07:00 PM - 08:30 PM	Shyamala Sahasra Kumkumarchana (Participatory Puja by devotees)
08:30 PM	Aarati and Dinner prasad

SUN 25TH JAN, 2026

08:00 AM - 10:00 AM	Shyamala Avarana Puja
09:00 AM - 09:45 AM	Deepa Prajwalana followed by Monthly Senior's Day program & Dance performance by Hansika Sundaresan
09:45 AM - 01:00 PM	Sangeeta Seva Yagya
01:00 PM - 01:30 PM	Lunch Prasad
01:30 PM - 07:00 PM	Sangeeta Seva Yagya
07:00 PM - 08:30 PM	Shyamala Sahasra Kumkumarchana (Participatory Puja by devotees)
08:30 PM	Aarati and Dinner prasad

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