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Nithya Raman Jolts LA Politics With Last Minute Mayoral Bid

India-West News Desk

LOS ANGELES, CA — Los Angeles politics and City Hall were stunned early February 7 when City Councilmember Nithya Raman filed paperwork to run for mayor, launching an eleventh hour challenge to incumbent Karen Bass just hours before the filing deadline.

The move was so sudden that, Raman's campaign website was barely live, featuring little more than her photographs and name. The sparse digital footprint underscored how new the bid is, catching allies, rivals

Contd. on P15



Ankur Patel Announces Run For LAUSD

India-West News Desk

LOS ANGELES, CA — Educator and long-time public school advocate Ankur Patel officially announced his candidacy for the Los Angeles Unified School District Board of Education, District 4, on February 3. Patel is a product of the district he seeks to lead and is running on a platform of local accountability and strengthening schools from the inside out.

If successful, his victory would be historic as he would become the first Asian American elected to the school board in 30 years and the first Indian American to ever serve on the body. At his filing, Patel emphasized a campaign built on

Contd. on P16



Kumar Jawa Of India Sweets & Spices Passes Away

India-West Staff Reporter

CULVER CITY, CA - Rajinder Kumar Jawa, the enterprising restaurateur and community builder who introduced generations of Southern Californians to affordable Indian vegetarian cuisine through his India Sweets and Spices stores, passed away on the night of February 16.

He is survived by his wife Debra and their two children, Raj and Nisha. Son Raj posted that his father passed, "after nearly 6 months in various

Contd. on P10

Badshah Enjoys NBA All-Star Game In Inglewood



India-West News Desk

INGLEWOOD, CA — Rapper and hitmaker Badshah participated in the 2026 Ruffles® NBA All-Star Celebrity Game. The event, held on

Contd. on P28

SoCal Traffic Is Bad, But Consul General Srinivasa Is Moving At A Brisk Clip

By NIMMI RAGHUNATHAN

No matter where you stand in the political spectrum, there is no question that the Indian American community is working its way through a moment. In a blindingly swift reversal, it now finds itself caught in MAGA-fueled hostility after decades of being viewed as a model

minority. Add to that the fraught state of US-India relations, and the opening of an Indian Consulate in Los Angeles couldn't have been better timed. *Geographic Reference*

For decades, the Southern California community has written, called, and pleaded with South Block for representation here. Now, the man from Delhi is not only here, but seemingly every-

where. Consul General Dr. K.J. Srinivasa can be found greeting devotees at temples, gurdwaras, and mosques or networking with the community around service, business, and culture.

And he is also doing what diplomats do, meeting think tanks and elected officials of every stripe, drumming up business interest, and

Contd. on P4

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COMMUNITY

IALA Hosts Vibrant India Republic Day Evening

India-West News Desk

BURBANK, CA – The India Association of Los Angeles (IALA) celebrated India's 77th Republic Day with a gala at Arbat Banquet Hall, here. The evening paid tribute to the Constitution of India and the nation's enduring journey of unity, resilience, and hope. Blending cultural pride with joyous festivities, the program, attended by more than 500 people, embraced modern India through music, dance, and a vibrant community spirit.

The January 31 gala also featured speeches and a live band. The Consul General of India in Los Angeles, Dr. K. J. Srinivasa, attended as the chief guest. Other

guests included Democratic Congressman Brad Sherman, Los Angeles city Councilmembers John Lee and Nithya Raman, District 3 LAUSD Director Scott Schmerelson, Bakersfield Deputy Mayor Manpreet Kaur, and additional representatives from local and regional offices.

The formal program began with the national anthems of the US and India. Consul Srinivasa underscored the consulate's mission to expand trade, investment, and cultural ties while encouraging attendees to reflect on India's extraordinary progress.

Rep. Sherman, in his address, reflected on his long association with IALA and reaffirmed his



support for the Indian American community. Nithya Raman spoke about the strength of community and shared her personal experiences as an Indian American.

IALA President Falguniba Zala and IALA Chairman Pramesh Shah introduced the organization's of-

ficials and remarked on the work undertaken by it.

IALA honored outstanding community leaders with Awards of Excellence, recognizing Ravi Marwah, Dr. Abhijeet Singh, Dev Barad, Jigar Barot, and Aanand Desai for their philanthropy, service, and

unwavering commitment to uplifting the community.

Audiences were then treated to a rich lineup of performances. The Sonali Vasa Group presented a graceful fusion of classical Indian styles—Kathak, Odissi, and Mohiniyattam—ushering in the spirit of spring. Students from the Kathak Kala Academy offered a patriotic Kathak piece, while the Rhythm School of Dance showcased contemporary Bollywood and Indian folk routines. Bollywood Beats Dance Studio energized the crowd with dynamic performances.

A curated fashion show, coordinated by Shagun Gupta, added a modern collection infused with an Indian aesthetic.

Raj Shah of SoCal-based MSI Named New Pratham USA Board Chair

India-West News Desk

HOUSTON, TX-Pratham USA has announced a leadership transition at the top of its National Board of Directors, with Raj Shah set to assume the role of Chair effective April 1.

The transition follows the completion of the three-year term of current Board Chair Dhiren Shethia, who will step down at the end of March 2026 but continue to serve as a member of the National Board.

Pratham USA said the change is part of a planned succession pro-



cess. Shah, who currently serves as Vice Chair of the National Board, has been closely associated with

the organization and its mission for several years. During his tenure as Chair, Shethia oversaw efforts to strengthen board governance, expand and diversify board representation, and support the organization's long-term growth strategy.

Incoming Chair Raj Shah is co-CEO of MSI and has previously held senior roles in investment banking at Lehman Brothers.

He also serves on the boards of Pratham USA's Los Angeles chapter and the Orange County chapter of the Young Presidents' Organization.

"Pratham's mission has long resonated with me, and I am honored to step into the role of Board Chair," Shah said. "I look forward to building on the strong foundation in place and working closely with the board and leadership team to advance Pratham's impact."

Pratham USA CEO Manisha Bharti said, "Dhiren's leadership has been instrumental in strength-

ening Pratham USA's impact, and I am deeply grateful for his strategic counsel and commitment," Bharti said. "Raj brings long-standing dedication, deep institutional knowledge, and thoughtful leadership, and I am confident he will guide the organization effectively into its next phase."

Pratham USA works to support large-scale education initiatives focused on improving learning outcomes for children and young people and mobilizes resources through a national network of chapters across the United States.

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Consul General Srinivasa Is Moving At A Brisk Clip

Contd. from P1

shoring up India's image across his jurisdiction of 10 counties in Southern California, plus the states of Arizona, Nevada, and New Mexico.

The diplomat may be only a few months into his job here, but he is an old California hand, having previously served as Deputy Consul in San Francisco. With that experience under his belt, along with tours of duty in Peru, Spain, and South Africa, and a stint as Ambassador to Guyana, Srinivasa brings one more ace that should especially endear him to a community perennially disgruntled with visa and passport services: He has served as Chief Passport Officer in the Ministry of External Affairs and is credited by the Government of India for his role in introducing the "path-breaking Passport Seva Project System."

But before he was Srinivasa the passport champ and diplomat, he was, in his previous avatar, Srinivasa the medical doctor. The only son of doting parents, he was educated in Chitradurga and Dharwad, and when he left for Mysore Medical College, it seemed he would naturally follow in the footsteps of his surgeon father. But, as he explained while speaking to India-West in his expansive, easy style where he makes the person across from him feel he is a friend, diplomacy was to be his calling.

The Consul is married to Ashwini, an IT professional who has turned homemaker, given the demands of his roving career and the challenges of raising two boys. The younger son is still at home and in high school, while the older is pursuing his bachelor's degree at Georgia Tech.

India-West had an easy, informal chat with him so readers would know a bit more about him and his work. Excerpts:

Q: You have been the envoy to Guyana, which has a diaspora with historical links to India. How do Californian Indians differ from them?

A: Quite a bit. In Guyana, because the community has been there for so long, they have few direct links with India. You could say their understanding of India is a bit frozen in time. Here in California, the migration has been voluntary



The CG with Nevada Governor Joe Lombardo earlier in January this year.

and much more recent, so the focus tends to be on money, trade, business, and education. The older, settled diaspora in Guyana is more laid-back and culturally oriented. What's really interesting about the US is that the diaspora

actively exercises its rights. It's not unusual for people, whether they have official connections or not, to reach out to Indian officials, even ministers, or anyone else they think will listen to their concerns!

Q: What are Delhi's directions on how to deal with us?

A: We do everything we can to understand the community and address their needs. We have a strong sense of accountability. India has been aware of the diaspora's needs since the start of the century, but the real push has come under the current government, since 2014. For example, ministers traveling abroad make it a point not just to meet local officials, but also to connect with the Indian community.

Q: How would you characterize the current state of India US ties as the world order and world trade gets refashioned?

A: Recently, in LA, I was at a meeting with several European diplomats and from other regions and the general talk amongst them was that what we are witnessing now is America making a push to retake its position in the world. This is causing a resetting of world trade and diplomacy. Despite the situation with tariffs, everything else continues in terms of India's partnership with the US – defense, maritime, security and other areas. Backchannel talks

continue. We are optimistic enough and are aiming for \$500 billion in trade with the US by 2030.

Q: What is the visible stress because of the tariffs?

A: I was in Las



Dr. Srinivasa with wife Ashwini

Vegas with Indian exporters. Gems, textiles, autos, have definitely been hit by the current climate. But they told me they've started shifting to other markets. For a while, the high profit margins and ease of doing business with the US let them coast along, but now they're finding good opportunities elsewhere too. As a country, our trade ties are expanding, and we can expect the FTA with the EU to be signed soon.

Q: Are you working with law enforcement agencies in LA given the rising concerns around hate crimes?

A: Thankfully nothing has happened in this area since I have come and hope it remains that way. There was a small incident though when I was to visit the temple in Canoga Park, with someone tweeting and issuing a threat against me. Nothing came of it but security got involved. So yes, we remain vigilant, our eyes and ears are open. We do have contact with the FBI, LAPD and others.

Q: Have you been approached about the veto of SB 509 by Governor Gavin Newsom?

A: That happened before I came here and no, no one has contacted me about it. But I will say this: Governor Newsom made the right decision.

Q: LA has among the finest education institutions in the world what is the consulate doing to harness talent for India?

A: We're focused on bringing business and academia together. Across the country, we're encouraging campuses to open in India. There's a lot of exciting research happening with ISRO, and Arizona State University is collaborating with the Tatas on AI and semiconductors. Here in LA, I've been engaging with universities, and very soon we'll be bringing them together with industry to interface at the consulate. The response so far has been very positive. Private universities, in particular, seem to be able to move quickly.

Q: Cricket is going to be part of the LA Olympics. Cultural diplomacy and soft power?

A: I expect more and more sports delegations to come into town, both because of cricket and because of India's bidding for the Olympics in Ahmedabad. There's a lot to learn from LA about the process, planning, and execution... and if India's bid succeeds, then...! Cricket is definitely creating a buzz, though I keep asking, where are the stadiums? I've heard about Shah Rukh Khan buying a team that something is happening in Irvine, and then that Pomona is a potential site... Beyond sports, our cultural power is strong. Films, music, dance, and food are already very popular in this part of the US. There's also a lot happening on the tech side in Hollywood, with CGI and other innovations.

Q: The consulate is often the first point of contact in emergencies. What systems has the consulate put in place for the community?

A: We've been given specific mandates. One is to operate a 24/7 helpline. In cases of the death of an Indian national, we guide families to the right cremation services and help with all the paperwork. If a family wants the body repatriated, we work closely with the coroner's office, coordinate with airlines, assist with documents, and, if there's financial difficulty, provide support through the Indian Community Welfare Fund.

Another important area is domestic violence. I stay in touch with community organizations on this issue, and at the consulate, we have a

dedicated woman officer whose role is to assist victims. We also facilitate online court hearings. For example, if a husband is in the U.S. and has abandoned his wife in India, we help ensure the legal process can move forward smoothly.

Q: What are the main misconceptions you face when you meet officials and industry leaders?

A: Nothing really that stands out. I have met the Governor of Nevada, talked to US Senators and city mayors and when we suggest to elected officials that they visit India with business delegations they have all been ready and excited about India.

Q: You are a trained physician... what's with the leap into diplomacy?

A: Many people ask me that! I was in my internship year in medical college when I decided to take the civil service exam. I did not do any special preparation or coaching, and when I came in eighth in all India ranking on my first attempt, my friends were pretty shocked! I had always been interested in policy, foreign policy in particular, because that is where I feel real change can happen. Bureaucrats do much of the heavy lifting. My family did not stand in my way and encouraged me to follow my own path.

SHORT TAKES:

In your free time you would:
Go trekking.

Favorite Hollywood star:
Julia Roberts.

Best thing you have eaten in SoCal:
Avocado Burrito Chaat.

SoCal traffic:
Worse than Bengaluru!

LA weather:
Beautiful, like Mysore.

Favorite SoCal beach:
Sunset Beach. Have not been to too many yet.

LA Museum you would go back to:
The Getty.

Book you are reading now:
'The Last Action Heroes: The Triumphs, Flops, and Feuds of Hollywood's Kings of Carnage.' Great when you are stuck in traffic.

The best diplomat:
Lord Krishna.

Most interesting person you have met in CA:
Too many to name...Arogyaswami J. Paulraj at Stanford and Manilal Bhowmik.

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Voice of the Indian American Community

Advertising: advertising@indiawest.com

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Publisher
Navneet Chugh

Graphic Designer
Rishita Dagli

President
Parminder Singh

Advertising
advertising@indiawest.com

Editor
Nimmi Raghunathan

Content
Ravjot Kaur
Bhartti Kumar
Reena Rathore

Offices:

Los Angeles, CA
15925, Carmenita Rd,
Cerritos, CA 90703

Santa Clara, CA
1600, Duane Ave,
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295, Pierson Ave, Ste
101, Edison, NJ 08837

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COMMUNITY

Maitri Youth Convention Spotlights Mental Health



India-West News Desk

CUPERTINO, CA - Youth leaders, mental health professionals and families gathered at the Cupertino Public Library on February 8 for the Maitri Youth Convention, a youth led forum focused on emotional wellbeing and mental health awareness.

Hosted by Maitri, the event brought together high school students from across the region to openly discuss the pressures shaping young lives, from academic stress and family expectations to social media influence and stigma around seeking help.

The convention was formally inaugurated by Cupertino Coun-

cilmember Sheila Mohan, who underscored the importance of community spaces that empower young voices. Her remarks set the tone for an afternoon centered on dialogue, understanding and collective responsibility.

Keynote speaker Shalini Dayal, a licensed Marriage, Family and Child Therapist, drew clear distinctions between stress, anxiety and depression, encouraging young people to recognize early warning signs and seek support. She emphasized that open communication within families can prevent emotional build up and foster healthier relationships. Through interactive engagement with the audience, Dayal offered practical tools for emotional regulation and resilience.

Guest speaker Preet Sabharwal, a licensed clinical psychologist, addressed the unique experiences of South Asian youth raised in the

United States. He spoke about balancing dual cultural identities while navigating societal and familial expectations. Sabharwal outlined strategies for maintaining emotional health amid competing pressures, noting that identity conflict can often intensify stress if left unaddressed.

Throughout the afternoon, youth speakers took the stage to share personal stories and reflections. They discussed the importance of family support during times of struggle and called for breaking stigma within the Desi community around therapy and mental health care. Students spoke candidly about coping with academic competition, navigating breakups, managing relationship dynamics and building emotional resilience.

Several speakers highlighted the impact of digital media, influencer culture and toxic masculinity on young men's mental health, urging

peers to challenge harmful norms and support one another. Others focused on youth advocacy and leadership, encouraging attendees to become active participants in shaping healthier school and community environments.

The program also included question and answer sessions, open mic talks, and peer-to-peer conversations that created what organizers described as a safe and empowering space. A central theme echoed throughout the gathering was that youth mental health is not merely a personal concern but a shared community responsibility.

GOPIO-LA To Be Helmed By Baljinder Tahim



India-West News Desk

ANAHEIM, CA – The Global Organization of People of Indian Origin Los Angeles Chapter new leadership team for the 2026-2027 term is being led by Baljinder Tahim as president. The local chapter gathered at the Tawa restaurant banquet hall to transition leadership and swear in the executive committee members who will guide the organization for the next two years. Demographics

Tahim has been a foundational member of the Los Angeles group since its inception and previously served as the vice president. His deep involvement in every major project undertaken by the chapter led to his unopposed selection for the top leadership role, the organization said.

Joining Tahim on the executive committee are Vice President Aparna Hande, Secretary Yatri Shukla, and Treasurer Meeta Gupta. The committee is rounded out by Joint Secretary Priya Kumar and Chairman Charu Shivakumar. The new team officially took their positions effective January 1, 2026.

The new executive committee has appointed the board of trustees for the 2026-2027 period. The appointed trustees include Kewal Kanda, Ashok Madan, Rajinder Dhunna, Kalika Gupta, Navin Gupta, and Anju Garg.

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COMMUNITY

Glittering Inaugural Reception Held By Consulate In LA To Mark India R-Day

By FATEMA BALDIWALA

LOS ANGELES, CA – India's 77th Republic Day was marked with ceremony and political significance on January 26 at the California Club in downtown Los Angeles, in the first Republic Day reception hosted by the Consulate General of India in Los Angeles. The event drew elected officials, diplomats, community leaders, and figures from the arts and culture, reflecting the expanding role of the Indian diaspora in California.

The celebration drew an impressive roster of dignitaries, including Congressman Brad Sherman, Los Angeles City Councilmember Nithya Raman (District 4), Beverly Hills Mayor Dr. Sharona Nazarian, Santa Monica Mayor, the Deputy Mayor of Los Angeles, Riverside Councilmember Steven Robillard (Ward 3), representatives from the offices of the Lieutenant Governor of California and the California State Senate, members of the diplomatic corps, and leaders from across Southern California's Indian American community.

At the heart of the celebration was a reflection on India's constitutional values and its evolving role on the global stage. In his



address, Consul General of India Dr. K.J. Srinivasa highlighted the enduring democratic ideals enshrined in India's Constitution.

"In 1950, India drafted a constitution that gave enduring expression to the ideals of liberty, equality, and justice," he said. "The Indian Constitution begins with the words 'We, the People,' inspired by the United States Constitution. These principles remain central to India's democratic ethos."

Srinivasa emphasized India's emergence as a global leader, noting that India recently became the world's fourth-largest economy.

He pointed to India's role as a major engine of global growth, a hub for technology and innovation, and a responsible stakeholder in global governance.

Speaking to the significance of the location, he added that Los Angeles, defined by creativity, diversity, and innovation, plays a unique role in the India-U.S. relationship.

"California, and Los Angeles in particular, serves as a bridge between Asia and America," he said, citing expanding cooperation in technology, climate action, artificial intelligence, semiconductors, clean

energy, and defense innovation, as well as growing collaboration between Hollywood and India's film and digital media industries.

Two distinguished individuals were honored for lifetime contributions spanning science and culture: Dr. Mani Bhaumik, the acclaimed physicist known for his pioneering role in developing the excimer laser, which paved the way for LASIK eye surgery and tabla maestro Pandit Abhijit Banerjee, was celebrated for his extraordinary and enduring contributions to Indian classical music.

Elected officials echoed the

themes of democracy, representation, and shared values.

Councilmember Raman spoke movingly about representation and belonging. "I moved to Los Angeles as an adult, and I was absolutely proud and overjoyed that this city was willing to elect a person of South Asian descent," she said. "Through my presence and partnerships, we've been able to honor Indian history and South Asian culture at City Hall. In Los Angeles, we say India and America will continue strong, will continue our friendship, and will continue achieving success together."

Beverly Hills Mayor Dr. Sharona Nazarian, joined by Huma Ahmad, the city's first Indian American City Clerk, reflected on democracy as both a celebration and a responsibility.

Congressman Sherman emphasized the community's achievements, stating, "Indian Americans are the best educated and highest income earners in the United States. Given the intelligence of the community, it's not surprising that so many help design and build the future right here in Los Angeles."

The evening concluded on a celebratory note with a showcase of Indian classical and folk dance.

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Meet Caltech Astronomer Shrinivas Kulkarni

India-West News Desk

PASADENA, CA – Long before he became one of the world's most influential astronomers, Shrinivas Kulkarni grew up in a tightly knit, unusually accomplished Indian family, moving from town to town across Karnataka as the son of a government doctor. The youngest of four siblings, he would go on to chart the most fleeting and violent events in the universe, even as his sisters carved out distinguished paths of their own in medicine, education, philanthropy, and global technology.

Now, Kulkarni, the George Ellery Hale Professor of Astronomy and Planetary Science at Caltech, has been awarded the Gold Medal of the Royal Astronomical Society, the highest honor bestowed by the London based institution since 1824. The citation recognized his “sustained, innovative and ground breaking contributions to multi wavelength transient astrophysics,” placing him in a lineage that includes Albert Einstein, Stephen Hawking and Edwin Hubble.

The honor also only the second Indian to receive the RAS Gold Medal, following Subrahmanyan Chandrasekhar, and the award explicitly acknowledged his “field

defining” role in shaping time domain astronomy, the study of cosmic phenomena that change or explode over short timescales.

Born in Maharashtra, Kulkarni was educated in Hubli before moving on to the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi. Excellence comes naturally to the family. His eldest sister, Sunanda, pursued medicine and served as a gynaecologist at a hospital in Bengaluru. Another sister, Jayshree, an alumnus of IIT Madras, is married to the billionaire Boston based technology entrepreneur Gururaj “Desh” Deshpande. His sister Sudha Murty is a celebrated author, educator and philanthropist, and the wife of Infosys founder Narayana Murthy.

Kulkarni's scientific rise began early. In 1982, while still a graduate student, he and his colleagues discovered the first millisecond pulsar, a rapidly spinning neutron star that reshaped understanding of stellar remnants. After earning his PhD from the University of California, Berkeley, he arrived at Caltech in 1985 on a Millikan Fellowship and joined the faculty two years later.

Over the decades, his work has repeatedly opened new windows on the universe. He played a key



Astronomer Kulkarni is also the brother of Sudha Murthy who is married to Infosys co-founder Narayana Murthy.

role in the discovery of brown dwarfs in 1995, objects too small to sustain nuclear fusion like stars. In 1997, he helped demonstrate that powerful gamma ray bursts originate far beyond the Milky Way, settling a long standing debate. In 2020, he was part of the team that identified the first fast radio burst erupting within our own galaxy, showing that these mysterious flashes can arise from magnetars, highly magnetized dead stars.

Beyond individual discoveries, Kulkarni has been instrumental in building the tools that make such science possible. He led the creation of the Palomar Transient Factory and later its successor,

the Zwicky Transient Facility, both based at Caltech's Palomar Observatory near San Diego. These projects have captured thousands of cosmic events in real time as they flare, blink or explode, and, as the award citation noted, “have revolutionized time domain astrophysics at optical wavelengths.” The Zwicky Transient Facility continues to survey the entire Northern sky every two nights.

Kulkarni has often described himself as an instrument builder at heart. Speaking during his 2024 Watson Lecture at Caltech, he reflected on a career spent constructing new ways to observe the universe. “My motto has been

to build a big enough gizmo and things will happen,” he said. Over his career, he has built or helped build 10 astronomical instruments.

He remains deeply engaged in future missions. Kulkarni is currently involved in developing NASA's Ultraviolet Explorer mission, slated for launch around 2030, which aims to conduct the most sensitive ultraviolet sky survey to date. He is also the principal investigator of Z Shooter, a powerful new spectrometer under development for the W M Keck Observatory in Hawaii, with first light expected in 2029.

During his doctoral years at Berkeley, Kulkarni met Hiromi Komiyama, a fellow PhD student from Japan. He learned Japanese within weeks, and the two married soon after. They have two daughters, Anju and Maya.

Over his career, Kulkarni has received numerous major honors, including the Shaw Prize, the National Science Foundation's Alan T Waterman Award and the Dan David Prize from Tel Aviv University. He is a member of the US National Academy of Sciences, the Royal Society of London, the Indian Academy of Sciences and the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences.

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COMMUNITY

Chandrika & Ranjan Tandon Endow \$11 Million To IIM Ahmedabad

India-West News Desk

NEW DELHI- The Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad (IIMA) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with philanthropist and alumna Chandrika Krishnamurthy Tandon and her husband Ranjan Tandon to establish the Krishnamurthy Tandon School of Artificial Intelligence, backed by a ₹100 crore endowment. Machine Learning & Artificial Intelligence

The agreement was exchanged in New Delhi in the presence of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, while India's Ambassador to the United States, Vinay Kwatra, joined the event virtually.

The proposed school will operate within IIMA as a specialized center



focused on artificial intelligence at the intersection of technology, management, and public policy, with an emphasis on real-world deployment and societal impact, a statement said.

The minister also acknowledged the philanthropic contribution of the Tandon family, saying alumna-led initiatives help strengthen academic institutions while ex-

panding national capacity in emerging technologies.

The new school aims to serve as a hub connecting faculty, industry leaders, policymakers and global partners to develop application-led and case-based AI

research. Its focus will include translating research into deployable solutions for business, governance and social sectors.

Officials present at the event included Higher Education Secretary Dr. Vineet Joshi, IIMA Director Prof. Bharat Bhasker, Joint Secretary (Higher Education) Purnendu Banerjee, and other senior ministry representatives.

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Nina Patel

Executive Director, Ronald McDonald House, Long Beach

AWARDEES



Roopa Sharma



Dr. Rita Puri



Zeel Ahir



Amy Ren



Kelly Ruggirello



Nimmi Raj



Melissa Evans

1. Roopa Sharma Co-President of One World One Family Foundation, CEO of Love All Serve All, Inc.

2. Dr. Rita Puri Recipient of the 2012 David Lawrence Community Service Award for Feeding homeless.

3. Zeel Ahir Councilwoman of the City of Artesia, Young rising politician.

4. Amy Ren Founder of Golden Girl Dance Troup; Award Winner in numerous Dance competition.

5. Kelly Ruggirello President of Rotary Club of Long Beach and Long Beach Symphony.

6. Nimmi Raj Editor of India West Newspaper and deeply involved in Indian community.

7. Melissa Evans Executive Editor of Long Beach Post and Long Beach Business Journal.

PROGRAM

Registration, and Snacks : 10:00 a.m.

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Zaileen Used Indian Heritage To Bring Super Bowl To CA

India-West News Desk

SAN FRANCISCO, CA – When Zaileen “Z” Janmohamed walked into the room to pitch the Bay Area to NFL owners, she knew she had five minutes and a choice. She could deliver the standard presentation about stadium readiness, hotel rooms and sponsorship potential. Or she could explain who she was, where she came from, and why the Bay Area looked like her life.

She chose the latter.

“There’s normally a five minute presentation to the owners,” Janmohamed told Silicon Valley Voice. “You talk about the Bay Area, what you’re going to do to grow the game. And I’m thinking, ‘Why don’t we say something that’s about how we’re going to do it, why we want to do this.’”

One slide in her deck stood out. It was not a market analysis or an infrastructure map. It was her story. Janmohamed

spoke about being the daughter of parents who immigrated from East Africa after political unrest, about growing up as an Indian woman in a male dominated sports industry, and about how the Bay Area reflected that same complexity and diversity.

“I talked about the fact that my parents are from East Africa and that I was an Indian woman working in an industry that was predominantly male,” she said. “I talked about the Bay Area being very reflective of those types of people. You could have heard a pin drop,” she told Silicon Valley Voice.

Her message was deliberate. “I think the Bay Area is a completely different region,” Janmohamed said. “We have diversity



that needs to be celebrated. If the NFL wants to grow this fan base, this is the place to do that.”

When she finished, NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell stood up and shook her hand. “He said, ‘I don’t know if we’ve heard that type of presentation before,’” Janmohamed recalled to Silicon Valley Voice. “I don’t know if that was good or bad but we got it, we got the game, so I’m assuming it was good.”

Super Bowl LX, now concluded, became a milestone not just for the region but for Janmohamed’s career, validating a leadership style rooted in authenticity and lived experience.

Sports taught her more than competition. They taught confidence, critical thinking and how to push boundaries. Her parents were initially hesitant but eventually supportive. “At some point, my parents realized I had this passion,” she told San Jose Spotlight. “But the early years were me just having to find my way to do the things that I loved until I got comfortable saying, ‘This is who I am. This is what I want to do.’”

Education gave structure to that passion. Janmohamed earned her bachelor’s degree from Simon Fraser University before moving to the United States for graduate studies. She completed an MBA and a master’s degree in sport management at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, building a foundation that blended business strategy with sports culture.

Her professional career spanned brand, agency and property roles across the sports and entertainment industry. Before leading the Bay Area Host Committee, she served as head of commercial development and innovation at LA28, where she worked on monetization strategies for the 2028 Olympic and Paralympic Games and helped launch the first name, image and likeness marketplace for Olympic and Paralympic athletes.

Today, Janmohamed lives in San Mateo with her husband, Arif Janmohamed, a venture capitalist, and their two sons, Aydin and Ihsan. She has said representation matters deeply to her, both as a leader and as a parent.

Sanjay T. Tailor Sworn In As Illinois Supreme Court Justice



India-West News Desk

CHICAGO, IL – Justice Sanjay T. Tailor, a veteran jurist with more than two decades of service on trial and appellate courts, was sworn in to the Illinois Supreme Court on January 30, becoming the first Asian American to serve on the state's highest court.

The installation ceremony was held in Chicago and was conducted by Chief Justice P. Scott Neville. Justice Tailor was accompanied by his wife and their three children. Congressman Raja Krishnamoorti

thi was among the dignitaries in attendance and offered remarks during the program. The swearing in ceremony was carried live on local television channels.

"I am honored by the trust and confidence placed in me by the justices of the Illinois Supreme Court," Justice Tailor said in his remarks. "I look forward to continuing the work of the court to ensure that our system of justice serves all people fairly and equitably."

Justice Tailor has served as a judge since 2003. His judicial career began as an associate judge in

the Circuit Court of Cook County, a position he held until 2021. In January 2021, the Illinois Supreme Court appointed him as a circuit judge and simultaneously named him presiding judge of the Circuit Court's County Division, making him the first Asian American presiding judge in Illinois. The following year, he was elected to the position of Cook County Circuit Judge, receiving 81 percent of the vote.

In 2022, the Illinois Supreme Court assigned Justice Tailor to serve as a justice of the Illinois Appellate Court, First District. During

his tenure on the appellate bench, he served as presiding judge of the Sixth Division and also sat on the Illinois Workers' Compensation Commission Division of the court.

Before joining the judiciary, Justice Tailor

practiced law as an associate at Chapman and Cutler and later as in house counsel at the First National Bank of Chicago. He earned his Juris Doctor degree from Loyola University Chicago School of Law, graduating cum laude. He later returned to Loyola, where he taught a course on Illinois civil procedure for two decades. He holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in biological sciences from the University of Delaware.

In addition to his judicial duties, Justice Tailor has been active in legal education and community service. He serves as a board trustee of the Illinois Judicial College, which oversees continuing education and training for Illinois judges. He is a past chair of the India Committee of the American Bar Association's Section of International Law and a founding director of the South Asian Bar Association of Chicago.

Justice Tailor has also held leadership roles in community organizations, including serving as a past president and board director of Apna Ghar, a domestic violence agency serving the Asian American community in the Chicago area. For 25 years, he served as a board director of Impact for Equity, a public interest law and policy center focused on addressing racial, economic, and social injustice in Chicago's underserved communities.

Kumar Jawa Passes Away

Contd. from P1

duced generations of Angelenos to Indian food with his iconic India Sweets and Spices restaurant and



suffered." He wrote, "He will be sorely missed by his family and the entire community."

Jawa arrived in the US in 1982 and, just two years later, founded India Sweets and Spices in Culver City. The modest storefront combined a grocery and vegetarian kitchen under one roof, an innovative concept at the time. Built with savings from jobs that included dishwashing and selling swimsuits on Venice Beach, the store grew into one of California's best known destinations for South Asian snacks, spices and hot meals.

He famously offered dishes such as samosas for "a dollar a dish" to university students, a gesture that helped build a loyal following.

Over the years, the business expanded to multiple locations and became especially popular among plant based diners for its wide selection of dals, curries, chaats, dosas and Indian sweets sold by the pound.

Today, the family continues to operate locations in Atwater Village and Park La Brea.

Congressman Brad Sherman called Jawa a friend and pillar of the community. "Kumar intro-

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PERSONAL PROFILE

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CRIME

Founder Of Stockton's 'Punjabi Devils' Motorcycle Club Pleads Guilty To Arms Dealing

India-West News Desk

SACRAMENTO, CA- The founder of a Stockton-based motorcycle club pleaded guilty to federal charges related to illegal firearms trafficking and possession of a machine gun, the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of California announced.

Jashanpreet Singh, 27, of Lodi, admitted to unlawfully dealing in firearms and illegally possessing a machine gun, according to U.S. Attorney Eric Grant, who announced the plea on February 2.

Federal prosecutors said Singh founded the "Punjabi Devils" Motorcycle Club, described in court filings as an outlaw motorcycle gang affiliated with the Hells Angels. On June 6, 2025, Singh attempted to sell multiple prohibited weapons to an undercover law



enforcement officer, including a short-barreled rifle, three assault-style firearms, three machine gun conversion devices, and a revolver.

A subsequent search of Singh's residence uncovered additional illegal weapons and components, including a fully automatic machine

gun, another conversion device, a firearm silencer, and high-capacity drum magazines. Authorities also seized a capped and fused "pineapple-style" hand grenade and an item believed to be a military-grade electronic claymore mine. The San Joaquin County Sheriff's Office Ex-



plosive Ordinance Detail destroyed both explosive devices at the scene as a safety measure.

Singh was initially charged in San Joaquin County Superior Court but failed to appear for a scheduled hearing on July 21, 2025, prompting a bench warrant for his arrest. Two days later, the FBI was alerted by U.S. Customs and Border Protection that Singh had booked a flight to India and was scheduled to depart from San Francisco International Airport on July

26, 2025. Law enforcement officers arrested Singh at the airport before his departure. He has remained in federal custody since his arrest.

"This case reflects the serious threat posed by illegal firearms trafficking and automatic weapons," Grant said in the announcement issued by his office.

Singh is scheduled to be sentenced on May 11, 2026, by U.S. District Judge Dale A. Drozd. He faces a maximum sentence of five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine for illegal firearms dealing, and up to 10 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine for possession of a machine gun. The final sentence will be determined by the court under federal sentencing guidelines.

Doctor Arrested In \$3.2 Mln California Hospice Fraud Case

India-West News Desk

OAKLAND, CA- Physician Shomir Banerjee is among seven individuals arrested and charged in connection with an alleged hospice fraud scheme in Monterey County, California, Attorney General Rob Bonta announced. Banerjee, identified as a medical director, is one of three doctors charged in the case, alongside

hospice owners and a nurse, following a multi-year investigation into fraudulent billing of Medi-Cal and Medicare programs.

According to the California Department of Justice, the investigation uncovered a conspiracy involving Spiritual Touch Hospice, Compassionate Touch Hospice, and Fountain Hospice. Officials said the defendants owned, operated, or worked across the three

hospice companies simultaneously and fraudulently enrolled patients who did not have terminal illnesses.

Investigators said some patients were unaware they had been placed in hospice care or that hospice services were intended only for the terminally ill. To avoid detection, patients were allegedly transferred among the three hospice companies after six months while fraudulent billing continued.

The Department of Justice said the scheme resulted in losses totaling \$3,211,419.79 to Medi-Cal and Medicare.

On January 30, 2026, the Division of Medi-Cal Fraud and Elder Abuse filed felony charges in Monterey County Superior Court against Nimfa Molina, a

head nurse; Luis Artavia, Mark Samonte, and Shomir Banerjee, all medical directors; and hospice owners Danny Lodevico, Flor Mora, and Christine Nuguid-Yem. The charges include false or fraudulent claims, conspiracy to commit a crime, and aggravated white-collar crime enhancements.

Mahendra Patel Sues Over Walmart Kidnapping Case



attempting to snatch a toddler from his mother inside the busy store. The charges were ultimately dropped last year.

The complaint names Caroline Miller, the child's mother, as well as the detective involved in the arrest and investigator Temperance Stoddard, who helped present the case to a Cobb County grand jury.

Patel said he was pulled over and arrested at gunpoint days after Miller reported to police that he had tried to grab her son while she rode a motorized scooter with two children on her lap inside Walmart. He has consistently maintained that he was only trying to help.

Surveillance footage from the store, later released by Patel's former attorney, appeared to contradict the mother's account and, Patel said, "changed the narrative" of the case. "It saved my life," he said of the video.

Still, Patel remained jailed without bond for weeks. Patel is seeking compensatory and punitive damages, along with attorneys' fees, as he attempts to clear his name after what he described as "a nightmare."

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India-West News Desk

ATLANTA, GA – "I went to get Tylenol and got the biggest headache of my life," Mahendra Patel told a press conference on February 9, recalling the day last year, when he walked into an Acworth Walmart and ended up in jail on felony charges that were later dismissed.

Patel, 57, a retired engineer and father of two, is now suing the woman who accused him of trying to abduct her 2-year-old son, along with Cobb County District Attorney Sonya Allen, the city of Acworth, the lead detective who charged him and the DA's investigator who presented the case to a grand jury.

Patel spent more than six weeks behind bars after being accused of

Seattle To Pay \$29 Million To Family Of Student Killed By Speeding Officer

India-West News Desk

SEATTLE, WA – The city of Seattle has agreed to pay \$29 million to settle a wrongful death claim brought by the family of Jaahnavi Kandula, the 23 year old graduate student from India who was killed by a speeding police officer in 2023.

"Jaahnavi Kandula's death was heartbreaking, and the city hopes this financial settlement brings some sense of closure to the Kandula family," City Attorney Erika Evans said in a statement February 11. "Jaahnavi Kandula's life mattered. It mattered to her family, her friends and to our community."

Roughly \$20 million of the settlement is expected to be covered by the city's insurance.

Kandula was pursuing a master's degree in information systems at Northeastern University's Seattle campus, located in the tech focused South Lake Union neighborhood. On January 23, 2023, she was struck and killed at Dexter Avenue North and Thomas Street.

Officer Kevin Dave was driving 74



miles per hour in a 25 mile per hour zone while responding to a drug overdose call. Authorities said he had his emergency lights activated and was using his siren at intersections when the collision occurred.

The incident drew widespread anger and protests, fueled in part by body camera footage from another officer that surfaced later. The recording captured Officer Daniel Auderer, then vice president of the Seattle Police Officers Guild, laughing and suggesting Kandula's life had "limited value" and that the city should "just write a check."

Auderer was later fired. He has since filed a lawsuit against the city alleging wrongful termination, saying his remarks were meant to criticize how attorneys were likely to respond to the fatal crash.

Officer Dave, who was driving the patrol vehicle, was also terminated. He was cited for negligent driving and ordered to pay a \$5,000 fine. King County prosecutors declined to pursue felony charges, stating they could not prove he acted with deliberate disregard for safety when he struck Kandula.

Tensions Flare At Frisco City; Right-Wing Targets Indian Community



India-West News Desk

DALLAS, TX – A packed hall of Indian Americans, right-wing agitators, many of whom had traveled from outside the city, filled the Frisco City Council chambers on February 3, and turned the meeting into a tense and emotional confrontation.

According to reports by the Dallas Observer and The Dallas Morning News, the meeting devolved into a verbal clash over immigration.

Several of the critics wore America First hats, Punisher symbol masks, and other right-wing insignia, the two papers reported.

The Dallas Observer reported that many of the agitators were not Frisco residents but had come from across North Texas after conservative social media influencers Kaylee Campbell and Marc Palasciano urged followers to attend the meeting and speak out against what they described as a "massive Indian takeover" of the city.

According to the Dallas Observer, the speakers alleged that H-1B visa fraud was driving demographic change in Frisco. Dylan Law, a University of North Texas student from Frisco, was quoted as saying, "Frisco is changing at a speed that no community can absorb without damage. When lifelong residents voice concern, we are told our concern is bigotry. That is a lie." He added that "parents are watching their children become foreigners in classrooms that their tax dollars paid for."

City data does show a sharp rise in the Indian origin population. A Frisco government survey cited by both newspapers found that Indians and other Asians now make up about 33 percent of the city's population, up from 10 percent in 2010. Critics linked this growth to the H-1B visa program, noting that about 75 percent of H-1B visas are issued to Indian professionals, according to federal data.

The issue has gained traction in Texas following Governor Greg Abbott's order freezing state hiring of H-1B workers.

Despite the fact that the Frisco City Council has no authority over federal visa policy, critics accused city leaders of enabling what they described as fraud.

Indian American residents of Frisco pushed back strongly, emphasizing that they were citizens, taxpayers, and contributors to the city's growth. The Dallas Morning News reported that Shanthan Toodi, a US Army veteran who served in Iraq and Afghanistan, said that while visa fraud should be addressed, framing the issue as an "Indian takeover" was wrong.

Frisco Mayor Jeff Cheney also voiced support for the city's diversity. According to The Dallas Morning News, Cheney said he was proud of Frisco's celebration of cultural festivals such as Holi. "Other than a handful of native Frisconians, every one of us is from somewhere else," he said. "When you choose to call Frisco home, it will always be our mission that you feel welcome here and that you feel safe here."

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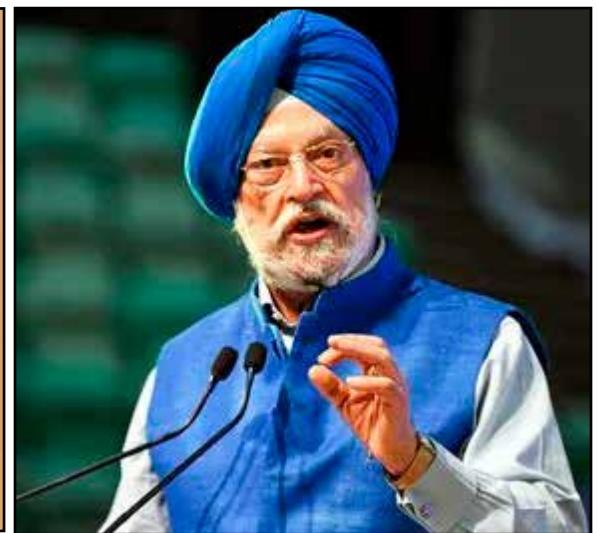
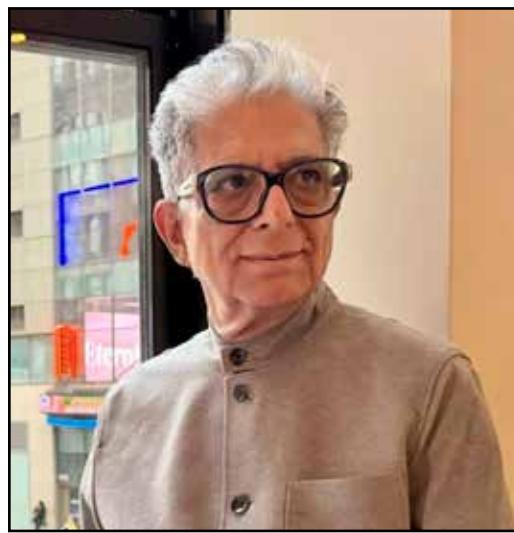
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Modi, Ambani, Deepak Chopra, Hardeep Puri, Among Indians Referenced In Epstein Files

NEW DELHI - References to Narendra Modi, Anil Ambani, Deepak Chopra, Hardeep Singh Puri and Mira Nair have emerged in newly unsealed United States Justice Department records linked to the late financier and convict Jeffrey Epstein, prompting official denials, clarifications and sharp political exchanges in India.

The Indian government moved quickly to dismiss any suggestion involving Prime Minister Modi describing the material in the Epstein files as “trashy ruminations” of a convicted criminal and unworthy of serious consideration. The response followed accounts of an email that referred to Modi in the context of a foreign visit, including a 2017 trip to Israel.

The records also include communications between Epstein and industrialist Ambani between 2017 and 2019. Messages recovered from Epstein’s phone show Ambani seeking information about Modi’s diplomatic engagements and requesting assistance in arranging meetings with senior figures in Washington during a period of heightened political activity in India.



In a message dated March 16 and sent from Delhi, Ambani wrote that leadership would like help organizing meetings in the US as soon as possible and referred to a likely May visit by the PM to Washington. A series of exchanges in May 2019 coincided with the counting of votes in India’s general election. Between May 14 and May 20, discussions took place about a possible meeting on May 23, the day results confirmed

Modi’s decisive reelection. In subsequent communication, Epstein described a meeting involving someone he claimed had been “sent by Modi” during the election period.

Separately, author and wellness advocate Chopra appears in emails and calendar entries from 2016 to 2019 documenting correspondence with Epstein. The exchanges referenced meditation sessions, insomnia

support and broader wellness discussions, as well as a conversation touching on President Donald Trump. Chopra has not been accused of wrongdoing and has said his interactions were limited to meditation and research related discussions. He expressed sadness for Epstein’s victims and said any contact reflected poor judgment in hindsight, while emphasizing that he had no involvement in criminal conduct.

The disclosures have triggered political reactions at home. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi raised the issue in Parliament, questioning why Ambani was “not in jail” and suggesting that references in the documents could create pressure on the Prime Minister in the context of an interim India-US trade deal. Gandhi argued that the material could exert indirect influence.

Union Minister Puri also addressed his name appearing in the documents. On February 11, he acknowledged that he had met Epstein “three or four times” over several years but insisted the interactions were limited and professional. A former ambassador to the United States, Puri said the meetings occurred through his association with the International Peace Institute. He maintained that professional engagement did not imply endorsement of Epstein’s conduct.

Filmmaker Nair is referenced in a 2009 email describing an afterparty in New York following an event connected to her film ‘Amelia,’ listing her among attendees at a private gathering. There is no indication in the documents of direct communication between Nair and Epstein beyond the social mention. (with IANS inputs)

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CA Candidate Rakhi Israni Reports \$1 Million Haul In 24 Hours

FREMONT, CA – Democratic congressional candidate Rakhi Israni has reported raising more than \$1 million within the first 24 hours of launching her campaign for California's 14th Congressional District, an early fundraising surge that her campaign says positions her competitively in one of the nation's most expensive media markets.

The campaign said it raised more than \$1 million a day after Israni formally entered the race for the open seat, describing the fundraising pace as an early signal of voter enthusiasm for her message and candidacy.

"I am honored to receive such an outpouring of support so early in this campaign, it's humbling," Israni said. "Californians are hungry for a fresh perspective and a focus on solving problems – rather than this continued culture of extreme division and



hate. I am confident that our campaign's uplifting message of change and our focus on grassroots organizing will lead us to victory."

The campaign said the funds would allow Israni to communicate her message "forcefully" in a region where congressional races often demand substantial early spending to reach voters across large and diverse communities.

California's 14th Congressional District is an Alameda County-based

seat spanning much of the East and South Bay and extending into the Tri-Valley region, including Dublin, Livermore and Pleasanton.

The district has nearly 50 per cent Democratic registration, with Republicans accounting for about 17 per cent. It is a non-white majority district, with Asian voters making up about 32 per cent of registered voters and more than 42,000 registered Indian voters, according to the campaign.

Israni lives and works in Fremont with her husband, Nitesh, and their four children, all of whom attend Fremont public schools. She founded a national test preparation company and has used her legal background to represent underserved families in family court and assist elderly clients with estate planning. (IANS)

Nithya Raman Jolts LA Politics With Last Minute Mayoral Bid

Contd. from P1
and political observers off guard.

Even Bass, a longtime ally, appeared blindsided. According to Politico, the mayor learned of Raman's decision shortly before it became public and later described herself as "flabbergasted."

The surprise was magnified by the rarity of such a challenge. It has been more than two decades since a sitting Los Angeles city councilmember mounted a serious bid against an incumbent mayor, making Raman's decision highly unusual in the city's political history.

Raman's late entry followed a week in of several high profile electoral exits. L.A. County Supervisor Lindsay Horvath, former schools chief Austin Beutner and billionaire

developer Rick Caruso all stepped aside, narrowing the field and creating an unexpected opening that Raman ultimately seized.

Raman, who represents the Fourth District, has increasingly emerged as one of the city's most prominent progressive voices, particularly on housing and homelessness. In 2020, she made history as the first Asian American woman and the first South Asian elected to the Los Angeles City Council. Supporters see her as part of a new generation of urban progressives focused on housing justice, public services and structural reform.

Her politics have drawn frequent comparisons to Zohran Mamdani, the New York City mayor whose rise energized progressive and democratic socialist circles nationwide.

Like Mamdani, Raman is affiliated with the Democratic Socialists of America and has not discouraged parallels between them, pointing to shared policy priorities and their South Asian backgrounds, according to various media reports., while critics question whether that approach can translate into citywide governance.

Born into a Malayali family in Kerala, she moved to the United States at age six, growing up in Louisiana. She earned a bachelor's degree in political theory from Harvard University and a master's degree in urban planning from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. After becoming a naturalized U.S. citizen at 22, she returned to India for several years, founding the research firm

Transparent Chennai to address sanitation and urban infrastructure issues.

She later settled in Los Angeles, where she co founded SELAH, a homelessness coalition, and served as executive director of Time's Up Entertainment.

Raman lives in the Silver Lake neighborhood and is married to television screenwriter Vali Chandrasekaran, a fellow Harvard alumnus. The couple have twins, Karna and Kaveri.

The primary is on June 2 and a possible runoff in November if no candidate secures a majority. Even if her mayoral bid falls short, Raman faces little personal political risk; her council seat is not up for reelection until 2028.

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Dr. Nirav Shah, Running For Governor, Named To List Of Nation's Visionary Leaders

India-West News Desk

BRUNSWICK, ME- Public health expert Dr.Nirav Shah, former director of the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention, has been named to The Washington Post's Post Next 50, a list highlighting individuals expected to shape American public life in the year ahead.

The annual list recognizes leaders across health, science, public service, business, and culture whose work is influencing national conversations. Shah is the only individual from Maine to be included this year.

The Post Next 50 is curated by journalists across the newsroom from hundreds of candidates, focusing on people whose impact is expected to be significant in the coming year.

This year's honorees include New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani, Texas U.S. Senate candidate James Talarico, and biochemist David Liu, placing Shah among prominent national figures from politics, science, and public service.

Shah rose to national prominence during the COVID-19 pandemic, when he led Maine's public health response as CDC director. His approach, marked by data-



driven decision-making and clear public communication, drew attention beyond the state. Following his tenure in Maine, Shah was appointed by the Biden administration as Principal Deputy Director of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, where he worked on national public health strategy and preparedness.

Reacting to the recognition, Shah credited the people he served. "This recognition really belongs to the people of Maine," he said in a

statement, noting the role of public trust, community cooperation, and frontline health workers during the pandemic.

The acknowledgment comes as Shah remains active in public life in Maine. He is currently campaigning for governor and, according to his campaign, leads the Democratic primary field in public and internal polling, has qualified for the ballot, and has launched a statewide volunteer organizing effort.

Ankur Patel Announces Run For LAUSD

Contd. from P1
extensive lived and professional experience within the system. A

2003 graduate of the district, he earned degrees from the University of California Los Angeles and California State University, Northridge before returning to the classroom as a teacher from 2018 to 2023. His resume also includes time spent in district leadership roles, including work as a coordinator for a school board member representing the San Fernando Valley from 2015 to 2018.

During his announcement at the Los Angeles City Clerk's Election Division, Patel outlined a vision that extends beyond standardized testing. He argues that "public education must prepare students socially and civically, moving beyond textbooks to help them understand their responsibilities in a rapidly changing world." Addressing modern challenges such as declining enrollment and competition from private institutions, Patel advocates for "making schools more engaging and connected to student needs."

District 4 deserves a board member who understands our schools not just from reports and meetings,

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FOR CHANGE
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but from classrooms, campuses, and communities, Patel reiterated.

His platform includes a focus on district budget accountability, financial literacy programs, expanded after-school options, and the development of clear career pathways. He believes the district must respond to modern pressures by helping students see learning as meaningful and exciting. "This isn't about ideology," he noted, adding that it is "about doing the work together."

While the race for the Board of Education is nonpartisan, Patel has pledged to bridge ideological divides. He stated that his goal is to build the best public school system in the world by centering quality education and respecting the diverse choices families make for their children. The decisions made by the school board directly affect classrooms, teachers, and families in District 4, Patel said and "I am running to listen, to collaborate, and to make sure our schools work for every child."

The primary is scheduled for June 2, 2026.

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Lt. Gov. Aruna Miller Welcomes Buddhist Monks After 2,300-Mile 'Walk For Peace'



India-West News Desk

ANNAPOLIS, MD - Maryland Lieutenant Governor Aruna Miller on February 11 welcomed nearly two dozen Buddhist monks to the Maryland State House, marking the final stop of their cross-country "Walk for Peace," a 2,300-mile journey that began in Fort Worth, Texas, in October last year.

The monks, accompanied by volunteers and a dog named Aloka, arrived in Annapolis after walking through ten states and Washington, DC. It was the first time during the pilgrimage that the group visited an official residence of a state's First Family. Following their arrival from the Navy-Marine Corps Memorial Stadium, the monks were re-

ceived at the State House, where Miller escorted them through the House and Senate chambers. They were presented with legislative resolutions recognizing their journey and later met with local elected officials and members of the Council for Interfaith Outreach, which is chaired by the lieutenant governor.

"I am profoundly honored that this delegation of monks chose Annapolis as a stop on their journey," Miller said. She described the conclusion of the walk in Maryland's capital as symbolic, noting the city's place in U.S. history and the community response to the monks' message of peace and unity.

Governor Wes Moore and First Lady Dawn Moore also hosted the monks at Government House for a private lunch. Ahead of the meal, the monks were presented with Maryland State Flag pins to commemorate their visit.

"It was an honor to welcome these spiritual leaders to Maryland," Moore said, describing the walk as both a physical and spiritual undertaking and praising its message of peace.

Anne Arundel County Executive Steuart Pittman and Miller jointly



issued a proclamation declaring February 12, 2026, as "Walk for Peace Day." Montgomery County faith liaison Kate Chance presented a citation marking the occasion, while Capitol Police Lieutenant Colonel Glend McGuire honored the monks with a police badge.

When we started out, we were alone," Paññakāra said. "Now we walk together, with many people sharing this path toward peace."

The monks initially carried 1,000 peace bracelets to distribute along the route, eventually handing out hundreds of thousands by the time they reached Annapolis.

Vivek Ramaswamy Family Welcomes Daughter Savithri



India-West News Desk

COLUMBUS, OH - Entrepreneur and Ohio gubernatorial candidate Vivek Ramaswamy and his wife, Apoorva, have announced the birth of their daughter, Savithri. The couple shared the news on social media on February 4, along with a family photograph from the hospital.

The newborn is the couple's third child. In a message posted on social media, Ramaswamy said both mother and baby were doing well and expressed gratitude for the support the family has received. "Apoorva and Vivek are happy to share the news of their daughter's birth, Savithri," he wrote. "Mom and baby are doing well, and the family is deeply thankful for the prayers and kind messages from Ohioans and friends across the country." The family lives just outside Columbus.

Ramaswamy is the son of immigrants from Kerala who worked at a General Electric factory in Ohio. Now 40, he is campaigning for governor of Ohio following a 2024 presidential bid centered on criticism of what he described as "woke" culture and a pledge to dismantle affirmative action. Forbes has estimated his net worth at \$1.8 billion.

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ENVIRONMENT

UC San Diego's Ramanathan Wins 2026 Crafoord Prize For Climate Science

India-West News Desk

SAN DIEGO, CA – Climate scientist Veerabhadran Ramanathan, a distinguished professor emeritus at UC San Diego's Scripps Institution of Oceanography, has been named the 2026 recipient of the Crafoord Prize in Geosciences for pioneering research on atmospheric aerosols and climate pollutants.

The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences said Ramanathan's work "laid the foundation for understanding how small particles and gases in the atmosphere drive climate change," significantly advancing knowledge of Earth's energy balance and global warming.

Ramanathan said he was "speechless and humbled" by the honor, noting that recognition from the same academy that awards the Nobel Prize reinforces the scientific basis of climate research at a time of growing public debate.

UC San Diego Chancellor Pradeep K. Khosla said the award recognizes Ramanathan's "pioneering contributions to atmospheric science" and highlights how sustained investment in research helps protect the planet.

Over a career spanning five decades, Ramanathan transformed climate science by demonstrating in 1975 that chlorofluorocarbons are thousands of times more potent

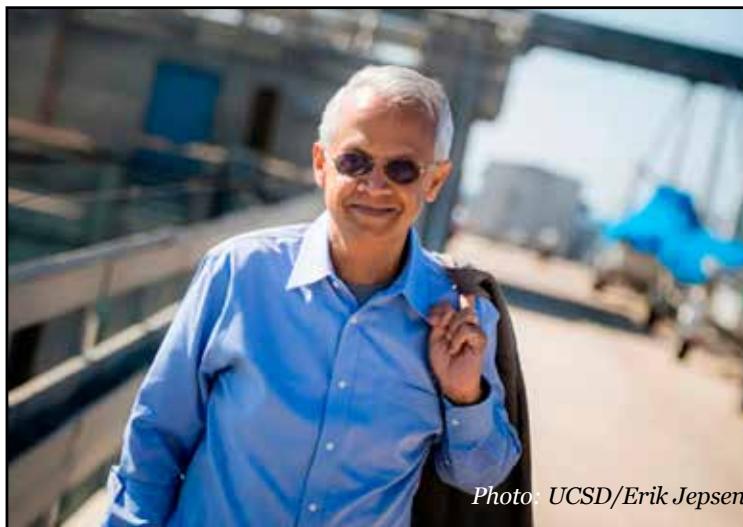


Photo: UCSD/Erik Jepsen

than carbon dioxide in trapping heat – a discovery that reshaped understanding of greenhouse gases and led to identification of other "super pollutants," including methane and hydrofluorocarbons.

During the 1980s, he played a key role in NASA satellite missions measuring Earth's energy budget, confirming that human-produced greenhouse gases are trapping increasing amounts of heat in the atmosphere. His later research showed that soot and other aerosols contribute to atmospheric warming, disrupted rainfall patterns, and accelerated Himalayan glacier melt.

These findings informed global climate policy, including efforts un-

der the UN-led Climate and Clean Air Coalition to curb short-lived climate pollutants.

Born in Chennai in 1944, Ramanathan earned his PhD from the State University of New York in 1974 and joined Scripps Oceanography in 1990. He has advised world leaders, served four popes through the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, and was a science advisor to the Holy See delegation at the 2015 Paris climate summit.

Ramanathan is the second Scripps scientist to receive the Crafoord Prize, which carries eight million Swedish kronor (about \$900,000). The award will be presented in Sweden during Crafoord Days from May 18–20, 2026.

Plastics Emissions Will Double Health Risks Worldwide By 2040: Forecast



tures accounting for 40 per cent of the health harms.

Air pollution, predominantly from plastics production processes, would account for 32 per cent, and the impact of toxic chemicals released to the environment across plastics' life cycles would account for 27 per cent.

The remaining health harms (less than 1 per cent) relate to reduced availability of water, impacts on the ozone layer, and increased ionizing radiation, the researchers said.

The model found that if the plastics system continues with no change

to policy, economics, infrastructure, materials, or consumer behaviors, annual health impacts could more than double from 2.1 million healthy years of life lost in 2016 to 4.5 million healthy years of life lost in 2040. Overall, the study estimates that the global plastics system could be responsible for cutting 83 million years of healthy population life between 2016 and 2040.

The modelling-based study compared the global human health impacts of several different future scenarios for plastics consumption and waste management between 2016 and 2040. Under a 'business as usual' scenario, by 2040, the negative health impacts from plastics could double, with greenhouse gas emissions and associated rising global tempera-



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IMMIGRATION

Democrats Slam SBA Rule Blocking Green Card Holders From Loans

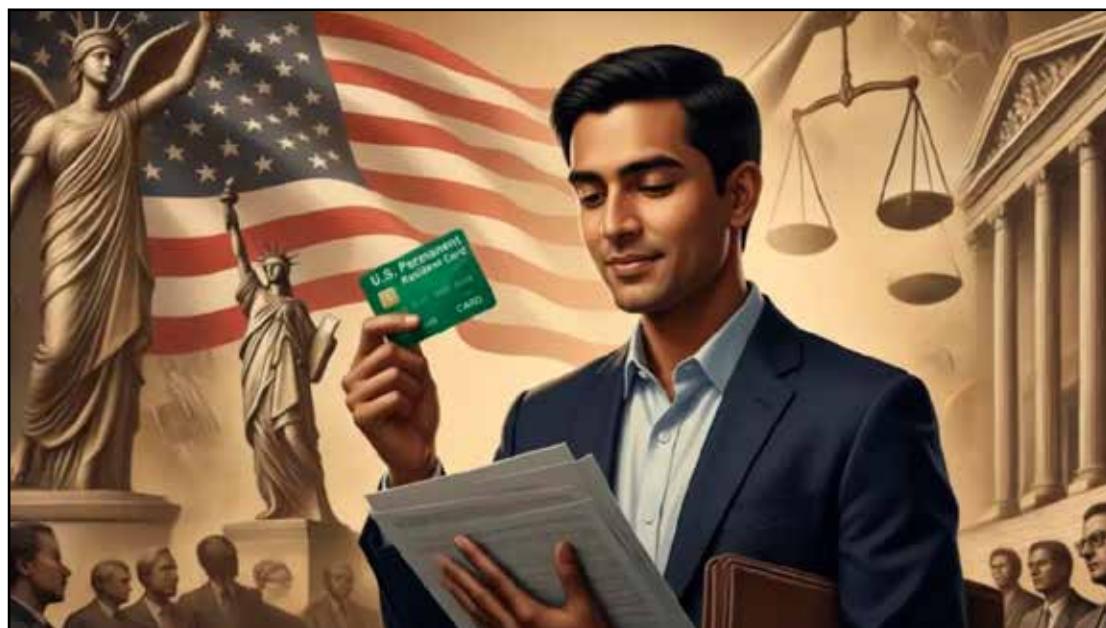
WASHINGTON, DC -Top Democrats have criticized a new Small Business Administration policy that blocks businesses owned by legal permanent residents from obtaining SBA loans. They said the move hurts immigrant entrepreneurs and local economies.

Senator Edward J. Markey (MA) and Rep. Nydia Velazquez (NY) said on February 4 that the policy reverses decades of practice and shuts out lawful immigrants who run small businesses.

"The Trump administration is stoking the flames of hatred, spreading fear and confusion among immigrants and small business owners," Markey and Velazquez said.

"Rather than support hard-working legal immigrants to start or expand a business, the Trump SBA is choosing hatred by barring green card holders from receiving an SBA loan. The Administration's message to immigrants is clear: you are not welcome to pursue the American Dream." The SBA published the policy on February 2, and it is set to take effect on March 1.

Under the rule, 100 per cent of a small business must be owned by US citizens or US nationals who live in the United States, its territories, or possessions. Legal



permanent residents, also known as green card holders, will not be allowed to own any share of a business seeking SBA-backed loans.

The policy also cancels an earlier SBA notice issued in December. That notice briefly allowed up to 5 per cent foreign ownership, including by legal permanent residents whose primary residence was outside the United States. The SBA said the earlier notice has been rescinded.

The December guidance had already drawn criticism. It listed several groups as "ineligible persons,"

including refugees, asylum recipients, visa holders, and individuals covered by Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals. It also singled out people who were citizens of or lived in China or Hong Kong.

Democratic lawmakers said the policy changes have caused confusion for lenders and borrowers, adding that access to SBA loans has dropped sharply.

In July, Markey and Velazquez wrote to the SBA warning that new citizenship checks were overly strict and would cut off eligible

small businesses. In September, Markey said SBA lenders told him the rules were difficult to apply and had slowed lending.

In December, Markey and other Democratic members of the Senate Small Business Committee sent another letter to SBA Administrator Kelly Loeffler, reiterating their concerns and pointing to a steep fall in lending.

That letter said SBA loan volume fell by 46 per cent from June to August 2025. Lawmakers linked the decline to new citizenship rules

introduced earlier that year.

According to the lawmakers, changes that took effect on June 1, 2025, blocked loans for businesses with even small ownership stakes held by noncitizens. This included refugees, asylees, visa holders, and conditional green card holders, even if US citizens owned most of the business.

They said the changes reversed more than 25 years of SBA policy. Markey and Velazquez said SBA loans help small businesses start up, expand, and hire workers, and that immigrant-owned businesses rely heavily on such financing.

The SBA said the new rules follow federal law and an executive order titled 'Protecting the American People Against Invasion'. Lenders must now certify that no owner of an applicant business is an ineligible person. The SBA has not publicly responded to the lawmakers' latest criticism.

For decades, the programs allowed businesses owned by US citizens and lawful permanent residents to qualify. Immigrants play a major role in the creation of US small businesses, with many starting firms that employ American workers and serve local communities across the country. (IANS)

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IMMIGRATION

Truck Driver Licensing Rules Get Formalized, Visa And English Required



India-West News Desk

WASHINGTON, DC – The Trump administration has issued new federal regulations narrowing eligibility for foreign nationals seeking commercial driver's licenses (CDLs) in the United States. Under the revised rules, only holders of H-2A, H-2B, and E-2 non-immigrant visas will be eligible to obtain it.

The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration said at least 17 fatal crashes in 2015 involved non-domiciled CDL holders whose qualifications could not be ensured and who would not have qualified under the revised standards. The agency also alleged that more than

30 states had improperly issued non-domiciled CDLs.

Several fatal highway crashes in recent months involved drivers Harjinder Singh, Jashanpreet Singh, Rajinder Kumar, and Kamalpreet Singh, all of whom are of Indian origin and held non-domiciled CDLs.

The updated framework ends the practice of allowing non-citizens with Employment Authorization Documents to apply. Under the earlier framework, non-citizens with valid work authorization, including asylum seekers, refugees, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients, and Temporary Protected Status holders, were eligible to apply. Under

the new rules, EADs will no longer be accepted as proof of eligibility. State officials are now required to verify each foreign applicant's lawful immigration status through the Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements (SAVE) system.

Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy said in a statement, "For far too long, America has allowed dangerous foreign drivers to abuse our truck licensing systems – wreaking havoc on our roadways," Duffy said. "Moving forward, unqualified foreign drivers will be unable to get a license to operate an 80,000-pound big rig."

Duffy added that the administration would continue enforcing English-language requirements.

ICE To Deport Illegal Indian Facing Child Assault Charges

India-West News Desk

EDISON, NJ – U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has arrested Vodela Yashaswi Kottapalli in connection with the sexual assault of a child under the age of 13.

Identified by federal authorities as an undocumented Indian national, Kottapalli is also facing

additional pending charges for public disorder and larceny related to shoplifting.

ICE confirmed that the suspect will remain in federal detention as the agency initiates formal removal proceedings under U.S. immigration law. It did not disclose the specific arrest date or the county where the criminal case originated.

U.S. authorities have stated

that individuals facing allegations involving minors are prioritized for both detention and deportation.

This detention occurs amidst a significant increase in the repatriation of Indian citizens from the US. The Indian government had recently informed Parliament that more than 3,800 Indians were deported in 2015 following nationality verification and high-

level coordination between the two governments.

Although the Indian government has not yet provided a detailed breakdown distinguishing between those removed for criminal charges and those deported for immigration violations, the figures highlight a period of intensified enforcement and bilateral cooperation on removal proceedings.



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The Grey Zone: India Wiggling Between US Demands And Russian Oil

MUNICH- Amid repeated assertions from the United States regarding New Delhi's purchases of Russian oil, India, reaffirming its 'strategic autonomy', has conveyed a clear message on the global stage that its energy decisions will be determined by availability, cost and risk considerations.

The remarks come against the backdrop of fresh US sanctions targeting Russia's oil sector and claims by President Donald Trump and Secretary of State Marco Rubio that India has agreed to halt additional imports of Russian crude.

Addressing the Munich Security Conference on February 14, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar rejected suggestions that a recent India-US trade understanding would undermine India's long-standing commitment to strategic autonomy.

His comments followed Rubio's statement that Washington had received assurances from New Delhi that it would refrain from purchasing more Russian oil after the latest round of US sanctions on Moscow's energy exports.

"The United States has imposed additional sanctions on Russia's oil. In our conversations with



India, we've gotten their commitment to stop buying additional Russian oil. Europe has taken its set of steps moving forward," Rubio was quoted as saying during the conference.

Earlier this month, President Trump had made a stronger assertion while announcing what he described as a breakthrough following months of trade tensions.

"India agreed to stop buying Russian oil and buy more from the US," he had said.

However, Jaishankar made it evident that India's foreign policy orientation would remain anchored in its independent decision-making framework.

"We are very much wedded to strategic autonomy because it is very much a part of our history and

Referring specifically to energy procurement, the External Affairs Minister described the global oil market as 'complex'.

"As far as energy issues are concerned, this is a complex market today. I think the oil companies in India, as in Europe, as probably in other parts of the world, look at availability, look at costs, look at risks and take decisions that they feel are in their best interest," he said.

Asked directly whether India would discontinue Russian oil purchases under the terms of the trade arrangement, Jaishankar said, "If the bottom line of your question is would I remain independent-minded and make my decisions and would I make choices which may not agree with your thinking; yes, it can happen."

India has so far neither formally confirmed nor denied Washington's claim that it has committed to stopping additional imports of Russian crude. (IANS)

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Reliance Gets US License To Buy Venezuelan Oil



India-West News Desk

WASHINGTON, DC – India has been keeping mum while President Donald Trump has been publicly asserting the possibility. Now, reports say, Reliance is indeed going to be buying Venezuelan oil after Washington formally granted the Indian refiner a general license.

The United States has issued a general licence to Reliance Industries Ltd. that allows the operator of the world's largest refining complex to purchase Venezuelan crude directly without breaching U.S. sanctions on the South American nation's oil sector, according to Reuters.

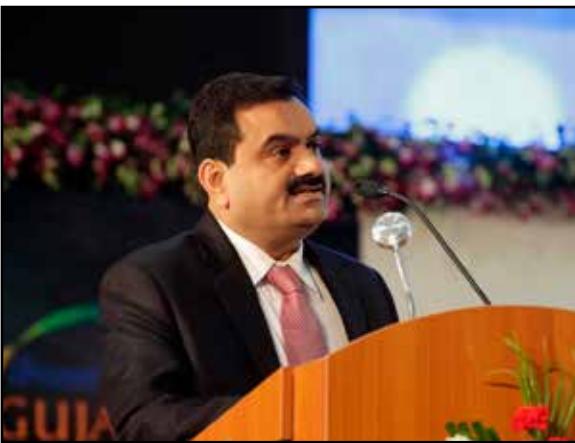
Under the license, Reliance, which is close to the Modi government, can directly buy, export, and sell Venezuelan-origin oil that has already been extracted, including refin-

ing it, in a significant shift by Washington toward easing the sanctions regime following recent political developments in Venezuela. The move could hasten Caracas' oil exports and lower feedstock costs for the Indian refiner, which had to halt direct purchases in early 2025 due to sanctions.

Reliance has already picked up around two million barrels of Venezuelan crude from trader Vitol since winning the license, CNBC and industry sources said, as heavy crude from Venezuela typically trades at a discount and could help the company replace some Russian oil in a cost-effective way.

Indian refiners, including Reliance, have also been avoiding Russian oil purchases for April delivery, a move that could smooth New Delhi's path toward a deeper trade relationship with Washington.

Adanis End Legal Stalemate, Agree To Receive US SEC Fraud Notice



India-West News Desk

NEW YORK, NY – Billionaire Gautam Adani and his nephew Sagar Adani have agreed to accept legal notice from the US Securities and Exchange Commission, allowing a long stalled civil fraud lawsuit to move forward after more than a year of delays because the two were in India and could not be formally served.

According to a joint court filing in federal court in Brooklyn, lawyers representing the SEC and US based counsel for the Adanis have agreed on the acceptance of service of the regulator's legal papers. This removes the need for the judge to decide on alternative methods of serving the defendants. The joint application has been submitted for the court's approval and is considered a routine procedural step in US civil litigation.

If approved, the agreement will formally

start the timeline for the case. The Adanis would have up to 90 days to either file a motion seeking dismissal of the SEC complaint or submit their formal response. The SEC would then have 60 days to file its opposition, followed by 45 days for the defendants to reply.

The SEC filed the civil lawsuit in November 2024, accusing Gautam and Sagar Adani of violating US securities laws by making false and misleading statements to investors regarding Adani Energy Ltd. The regulator alleges that they were misled about the existence of a bribery scheme linked to the company's business activities.

ately, federal prosecutors in Brook-
brought criminal charges against
is and others, alleging involvement
5 million bribery scheme in India
t securing solar power contracts.
ni Group has consistently denied
tions in both the civil and criminal

cases had remained effectively frozen over a year because the defendants, residing in India and had not been served with legal notices. Last week, the court to permit alternative methods, including email and service of other US law firms associated with this.

February Is Heart Health Awareness Month

Heart disease claims a life every 34 seconds, but understanding the risks and recognizing silent warning signs can rewrite that statistic. This guide from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) outlines essential data, symptoms, and preventable lifestyle shifts to help you protect your heart and those you love.

Knowledge, Prevention, and Early Action Save Lives

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), heart disease remains the leading cause of death in the United States. February is dedicated to raising awareness about heart disease, educating on dangers, recognizing warning signs, and taking steps toward better heart health.

Heart Disease by the Numbers

The impact of heart disease is staggering:

- Heart disease remains the leading cause of death in the U.S. in 2023. Cardiovascular diseases (including heart disease and stroke) accounted for 919,032 deaths — a rate of about 1 death every 34 seconds. Heart disease by itself is the largest contributor within this category.

- Heart disease is still the #1 cause of death for both men and women. While detailed sex breakdowns for 2023 aren't always published in summary tables, historically more than half of heart

disease deaths occur in men.

- The most common form of heart disease, coronary heart disease (CHD), caused about 349,470 deaths in 2023 (down from prior years).

- Approximately 805,000 Americans have a heart attack each year — with about 605,000 first-time heart attacks and 200,000 recurrent heart attacks.

- Someone in the U.S. has a heart attack about every 40 seconds before you finish reading this article, and 1 in 5 heart attacks is silent (meaning the person doesn't recognize it at the time).

- Heart disease remains extremely costly: total cardiovascular disease (including heart disease and stroke) cost the U.S. about \$168 billion in 2022, including healthcare services and medications (and broader cost estimates including lost productivity and indirect costs are higher).

Warning Signs of Heart Disease

Early recognition and quick action can save lives. Many sudden cardiac deaths occur outside hospitals, often because warning signs are ignored or misunderstood.

Common symptoms include:

- Chest pain or discomfort
- Pain or discomfort in the arms, back, neck, jaw, or upper stomach
- Shortness of breath
- Nausea, lightheadedness, or cold sweats



Most people associate heart attacks only with chest pain, but knowing all the symptoms—and calling 911 immediately—is what truly saves lives. Remember: Knowledge is power. Acting early matters.

Risk Factors You Should Know

About half of all Americans have at least one of the three major risk factors for heart disease:

- High blood pressure
- High LDL (bad) cholesterol
- Smoking
- Other conditions and lifestyle factors that increase risk include:
- Diabetes
- Overweight and obesity
- Poor diet
- Physical inactivity

prescribed medications as directed.

Eat a heart-healthy diet—low in salt, total fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol, and rich in fresh fruits and vegetables.

Exercise regularly, such as a brisk 30-minute walk, at least five days a week.

Don't smoke. If you do, quit as soon as possible. For help, visit smokefree.gov or cdc.gov/tobacco.

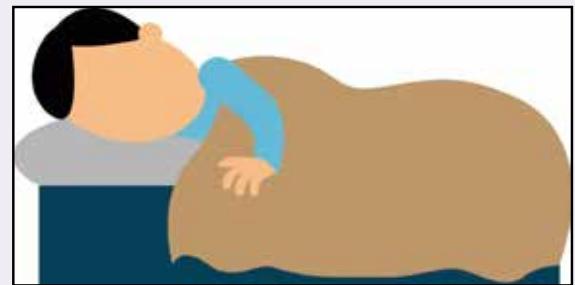
A Final Reminder

Prevention is the best approach to heart disease. It reduces long-term complications and helps you live a healthier, more productive life.

If you or a loved one experiences chest pain, excessive sweating, shortness of breath, or any suspected heart-related symptoms, do not drive to the hospital—call 911 immediately. The sooner medical care begins, the better the chances of survival and recovery.

This February, let's commit to heart health. What you've learned today could save a life—possibly your own or someone you love.

Better Sleep Made Easy With Five Simple Changes



Sleep is essential to nearly every aspect of human life, influencing physical health, mental well-being, and overall quality of living. It is not simply a time of rest but a critical biological process that allows the body and mind to recover, repair, and function properly. Hence, here are some useful tips that can help you sleep better.

Disciplined schedule

To keep your body clock stable, you should always try to go to bed and wake up at the same time every day, even on weekends. A consistent routine helps in forming a disciplined sleep cycle.

Create a sleep sanctuary

Your bedroom environment plays a major role in how easily you fall asleep and how well you stay asleep. Aim to keep your room cool and quiet by reducing disruptive noises. You can use a white noise machine, a fan, or soft ambient sounds to help mask sudden disturbances.

Practice caution in diet

Avoid having heavy meals or caffeine before going to bed, as it can disrupt sleep. Instead, opt for light snacks like bananas or chamomile tea. Digestive activity can keep your body alert and prevent the deep, restful sleep you need.

Limit screen time

Limiting screen time before sleep, ideally 30 to 60 minutes before bed, improves sleep by reducing blue light and brain stimulation, leading to faster sleep onset and better-quality rest.

Manage stress

Managing stress is crucial for good sleep because stress triggers hormones like cortisol, making it hard to fall asleep. Quality rest helps regulate these hormones, allowing your body and mind to reset, process emotions, repair, and build resilience for the next day. Practice deep breathing, meditation, yoga, or listen to calming music before bed.

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(ANI)

New York Author Has A Stunning Coffee Table Book On The Mahakumbh

By USHA AKELLA

In times when one often feels pressured to align with Left or Right and other fractured polarities, a book can point toward reconciliation and harmony. Rooted in the myth of nectar, and expansive in its scope, *Seeking the Infinite* reframes the Mahakumbh as a heritage of humanity, not solely Indian or Hindu.

The book 'Seeking the Infinite' draws attention to water as a central metaphor of purification, unity, and surrender. Within its pages, the Mahakumbh is presented as a call from India to the idea of one ultimate religion: humanity.

Dedicated to the journey within, Yakub Mathew's book seeks to capture the scale and meaning of the Mahakumbh, a once in 144 years riverine confluence at the Triveni Sangam in Prayagraj that welcomed an estimated 640 million devotees in 2025. The three rivers merging into a single stream are interpreted symbolically, most often as an emblem of unity. That one of these rivers, the Saraswati, is mythical does not diminish faith.

That such a vast gathering unfolded peacefully over nearly two months is remarkable. A coffee table volume spanning 246 pages, with striking photographs and

unafraid to ask fundamental questions and to attempt answers that move across form and formlessness, faith and agnosticism, ritual and dhyana. Throughout, the human soul remains central. The confluence of rivers continues on the page, inviting readers to move beyond narrow definitions of religion.

Mathew states his vision early, presenting the Mahakumbh as an international heritage not limited by geography. Though he calls himself an accidental author, he is clearly not an accidental seeker. The journey undertaken by a Syrian Christian, New York based banker with his wife and 18 friends to mark his 60th birthday and recovery from serious illness resulted in a lasting tribute to the Mahakumbh. His choice of this experience as a personal rite of passage reflects his inner inclinations.

The sounds and sights surrounding him during the two days were not experienced as chaos but as an interwoven quotations and narratives, *Seeking the Infinite* preserves the Mahakumbh in lasting form.

Turning the pages mirrors the journey itself, beginning with the opening chapter 'Blessings', featuring reflections by a mystic, Hindu yogis, and a Cardinal, including Sadhguru, Swami Avdeshanand Giri Maharaj, Maharaj Radhanath Swami, and His Eminence Cardinal Oswald Gracias. The reader then moves into deeper reflections before emerging with a renewed sense of India's enduring spiritual current. The book reminds us of a civilization

that such a vast gathering unfolded peacefully over nearly two months is remarkable. A coffee table volume spanning 246 pages, with striking photographs and

extension of his own inner rhythm. Immersing himself among the multitudes, he felt grateful for the opportunity to offer prayers for peace in a turbulent world.

The book brings together personal reflection, literary expression, academic insight, and spiritual inquiry. Essays explore the Mahakumbh from mythic to astronomical perspectives by contributors from fields including spirituality, fashion, religion, administration, medicine, journalism, business, politics, theater, academia, sports, film, art, and music.

The roster of 55 contributors includes Pujya Swami Chidanand Saraswati, Ayaan Ali Bangash, Kabir Bedi, Harish Parvatheni, Satya Hinduja, Dr. Shashi Tharoor, George Mathew, Lord Mehnad Desai, Rev. Victor Lobo, Rev. Father Thomas V. Kunukal, Dr. Navin Mehta, Farokh Engineer, Dr. Jagdish Bhagwati, Muzaffar Ali, Didi Krishna Kumari, Rakesh Kaul, Ashi Sonam Choden Dorji, Sadhvi Bhagwati Saraswati, Haji Syed Salman Chisty, Swami Swaroopananda, Anupam Kher, Swami Sarvapriyananda, Dr. Subramanian Swamy,

Mokshapriya, Suhel Seth, Yogi Mata Keiko Aikawa, Radhe Jaggi, Barkha Dutt, and Ustad Hidayat Khan.

The book should not be read simply as a collection of prominent names. Instead, it represents a convergence of voices offering collective homage to one of India's most significant sacred and astronomical events. In doing so, it invites reflection on India's role in the world and its enduring message of unity in diversity.

Although the crowds have dispersed and the event has concluded, the experience continues to resonate in those who took part. The Mahakumbh's pluralistic waters reflect an ongoing human search for the divine, expressed through many traditions but driven by a shared yearning for transcendence.

Symbolically, readers can still enter these waters through the pages of the book. For those, like myself, who could not attend the event last year, the book becomes a reenactment of the ritual and a way to experience its scale and energy.

(Akella is an Austin, TX, based poet and the author of 11 books, including poetry and spiritual musical dramas.)



At 100, Golden Globes Veteran Noel de Souza Releases First Novel 'Dust'

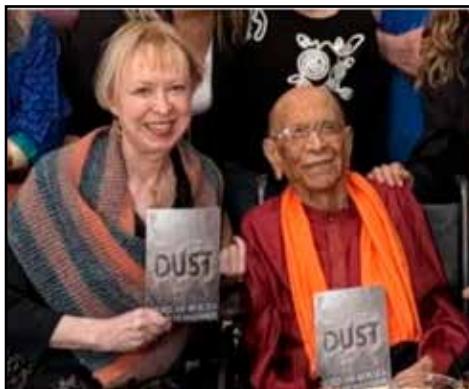
India-West Staff Reporter

LOS ANGELES, CA – Noel de Souza, actor, journalist, and long-time member of the Golden Globes, marked a rare milestone with the publication of his debut novel, 'Dust', on his 100th birthday. The book is co-written with Patricia Danaher and is based on a screenplay de Souza first developed more than fifty years ago.

Born in Secunderabad, de Souza immigrated to the United States as a young man and went on to build a career that spanned decades and disciplines. As an actor, he appeared in acclaimed television

series including 'Star Trek', 'The West Wing', 'Alias', and 'ER', earning recognition for performances noted for their restraint and depth. Beyond the screen, he spent more than seventy years associated with the Hollywood Foreign Press Association, becoming a respected presence within the Golden Globes and a firsthand witness to Hollywood's evolution across generations.

'Dust' is set in a parched Western town where the lives of displaced ranch hands, itinerant workers, and other marginalized figures converge in a forgotten jailhouse. The novel explores themes of labor, survival,



and human dignity, and has drawn early comparisons to the work of John Steinbeck for its moral clarity and portrayal of struggle. The story

originated as de Souza's screenplay 'The Bullpen', written decades earlier and later reshaped into a novel with Danaher's collaboration. Despite facing significant challenges with his eyesight in later years, de Souza remained closely involved in the book's creation, dictating scenes and shaping the narrative with care.

Danaher, a journalist, mythologist, and editor, helped translate the cinematic vision into a fully realized work of fiction, giving the story

literary structure while preserving its original intent.

More than a late debut, 'Dust' stands as the culmination of a century long life in the arts. It reflects de Souza's enduring commitment to storytelling and his ability to bridge acting, journalism, and fiction.

Through 'Dust', Noel de Souza offers readers a meditation on endurance, injustice, and hope, informed by a lifetime of observation and experience. The novel serves not only as a work of fiction but also as a marker of an extraordinary life devoted to creativity, performance, and engagement with the world.



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A Raw Truth About Eating, Energy And Aging Well

Eating close to nature is often framed as a sacrifice. In this excerpt, marathon runner and Los Angeles-based author Axay Shah flips that idea on its head, focusing not on what he gave up, but what he gained. Sixteen years into a raw, plant-based lifestyle, he reflects on energy, healing, and aging with intention. An excerpt from his new work, 'If It's Not Made By Mother Nature, It's Not Going On My Plate.'

When I made the decision to eat only what Mother Nature created raw, plant-based, whole foods, I wasn't thinking about what I was giving up. I was thinking about what I might gain.

Sixteen years later, I can tell you exactly what that looks like.

Energy like you've never felt

Within the first week, you notice it. That afternoon crash that used to hit around 3 pm? Gone. The brain fog that made 4 pm meetings feel like swimming through molasses? Cleared.

Your body stops spending energy fighting inflammation and starts using that energy for what it was meant to do: living.

At 66 years old, I have more physical energy than I did at 40. I'm not exaggerating. I'm training for my eighth marathon. I wake up without an alarm. I work a full day in home improvement sales, come home, spend time in my recording studio, check on my beehives, and still have energy to train. I'm not tired. I'm not dragging. I'm alive.

This isn't exceptional. This is what your body does when you stop poisoning it and start nourishing it.

The energy compounds. It's not a spike followed by a crash. It's steady, reliable, and real. And it changes everything about your work performance, your relationships, your capacity to show up for the people you love.



Healing that feels like coming home

Then comes the deeper transformation. The healing.

Your body is miraculous. When you stop introducing slow poisons into your system, it starts repairing itself. Inflammation quiets down. Your skin clears. Your digestion works the way it's supposed to. You look in the mirror and see a healthier version of yourself.

But it's more than what you see. It's what you feel.

The joint pain that made stairs difficult eases. The digestive discomfort that was just

"normal" disappears. The brain fog that made you think you were losing your mind clears.

I have 21 years of medical documentation showing this transformation. Blood work that improved. Reports that shifted from concerning to optimal. A body that heals faster, handles stress better, and recovers from physical exertion in half the time.

This is your birthright. This is what health actually feels like.

Longevity with dignity, power, and freedom

But here's what matters most, what most health conversations miss.

It's not just about living longer. It's about how you live those extra years.

At 66, I have energy, strength, and clarity. But more than that, I have freedom. I have privacy in my aging. I have confidence that I'm not going to become a burden. I have the power to pursue my dreams not someday when I retire, but now.

This is health span, not just lifespan. The difference is everything.

When you trust nature with what you eat, three times a day, year after year, you're building a future where you can work and create without pain limiting you. You can

play with grandchildren without worrying about your knees giving out. You can travel, pursue hobbies, and stay independent. You don't have to spend your 70s managing chronic disease. You don't have to surrender your dignity to aging.

You get to choose how you age. You get to stay strong, clear-minded, and vibrant.

Most importantly, you get to stay yourself. Not a version of yourself diminished by disease or limited by the side effects of treating disease. You get to be fully present in your own life.

The real promise

This isn't a diet. It's not a trend. It's not something you do for 30 days and then quit.

This is a philosophy: 'If it's not made by Mother Nature, it's not going on my plate.'

When you live by this principle, three times a day, year after year, something shifts. Your body remembers what it's supposed to feel like. Your mind clears. Your spirit lifts. You become the healthiest, most vibrant version of yourself.

And you stay that way.

The energy compounds. The healing deepens. The longevity becomes inevitable not as years on a calendar, but as years of quality, dignity, power, and freedom.

This is what happens when you trust nature completely.

This is what's possible.

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HOLLYWOOD**Miranda Kerr Reveals Secret To Family Calm: Vedic Meditation For Her Children**

LOS ANGELES, CA – Supermodel Miranda Kerr recently revealed that she has integrated Vedic meditation and the practice of “Vedic rounding” into her family’s daily life, teaching her children personalized mantras to foster a sense of calm and connection.

In an interview for the LYMA Power Women series in early February 2026, Kerr explained that her three oldest sons—Flynn, Hart, and Myles—have all been trained in the technique, which she has practiced personally since the age of 17. She tailors the duration of the practice to their ages: her six-year-old meditates for six minutes, her seven-year-old for seven minutes, and so forth.

Kerr noted that her eldest son, 15-year-old Flynn, has taken a proactive interest in the practice this year, requesting to join her for 20-minute sessions at 6:00 a.m. On the days he meditates, he says he feels much calmer, Kerr shared.

The model’s morning routine begins at 5:30 a.m., a habit she developed after meeting her husband, Snap Inc. CEO Evan Spiegel. Formerly a night owl, Kerr said she now embraces the early schedule and the quiet time it affords before her children wake up.

Her disciplined approach extends to the evening, where she begins winding down the household as early as 4:30 p.m. with an early dinner. By 5:00 p.m., she dims the lights and plays relaxing music throughout the house to help her children transition toward sleep. Once her children are in bed, Kerr dedicates time to her own wellness and skincare rituals, which include laser therapy and specialized overnight masks. (IANS)

**Farhan Akhtar Cast In Sam Mendes’s Film Series On The Beatles**

India-West News Desk

MUMBAI— Farhan Akhtar has been cast by director Sam Mendes in his upcoming project, ‘The Beatles – A Four-Film Cinematic Event.’



Akhtar was last seen in a Hollywood project in the web series ‘Ms. Marvel’, where he appeared in a supporting role.

According to Variety, Akhtar has been cast as legendary Indian composer and sitar maestro Ravi Shankar, whose work had a major influence on George Harrison and helped introduce Indian classical music into the sound of the Beatles in the 1960s.

The four-film project will feature separate films told from the perspectives of each band member. The cast includes Paul Mescal as Paul McCartney, Harris Dickinson as John Lennon, Barry Keoghan as Ringo Starr, and Joseph Quinn as George Harrison.

The Mendes-directed project will chronicle The Beatles’ rise from Liverpool to global fame and their eventual breakup in 1970. The band has granted full life-story and music rights for the scripted films. All four instalments are scheduled for a theatrical release in April 2028.

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**Kanye West To Perform In India**

NEW DELHI- American rapper-songwriter Kanye West, who has changed his name to Ye, will have his first performance in India on March 29.

The performance will take place at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium in New Delhi. Fans can expect expansive staging, cinematic large-format visuals, precision-engineered acoustics, and a career-spanning setlist that moves seamlessly from early era-defining anthems to contemporary classics.

Kanye’s music is characterized by frequent stylistic shifts and has been credited with paving the way for rappers who did not conform to traditional gangster conventions.

Born in Atlanta and raised in Chicago, West dropped out of college to pursue a music career. He became a producer for Jay-Z’s Roc-A-Fella Records and garnered recognition for his ‘chipmunk soul’ production style before signing with the label as a recording artist.

His debut studio album, ‘The College Dropout’, received widespread acclaim, and his second album, ‘Late Registration’, became the first of his eleven US Billboard 200 number-one albums. He has five US Billboard Hot 100 number-one singles — ‘Slow Jamz’, ‘Gold Digger’, ‘Stronger’, ‘E.T.’ as



a featured artist, and ‘Carnival’ — and was the first rapper to top the chart across three decades.

“We wanted this show to feel monumental, and it is. One night. One performance. The first time ever. We’re making sure more fans have the opportunity to be part of what will be the biggest concert India has ever seen,” said promoter Aman, founder of White Fox.

“India has reached a moment where our ambition, infrastructure and audiences are aligned with the biggest global productions,” said Sabbas Joseph, Co-Founder and Director of Wizcraft International.

He added, “A first-ever performance by Ye at this scale reflects how far India’s live entertainment ecosystem has evolved and how ready the country is to host landmark events that resonate worldwide.” (IANS)

HOLLYWOOD**Kal Penn Recalls Awkward 'Van Wilder' Audition Moment****TAJ MAHAL BADALANDABAD**

LOS ANGELES, CA- Kal Penn, whose breakout role was playing Taj Mahal Badalandabad in the 2002 comedy hit 'National Lampoon's Van Wilder', recalled an awkward moment from the film's audition.

At the end of the audition process, Penn faced one other actor who inspired him to work harder to win the part. Penn recounted the story on the podcast 'Hasan Minhaj Doesn't Know.'

"I knew at the end, it was like, 'All right, it's me and another actor,'" he said.

"I'm like, 'Which brother is it?' I'm excited that one of us is gonna get this. I open the door and it is a white dude in brownface who's already in the waiting room."

Penn added, "And my beef is generally not with other actors. Actors are desperate. We'll

do whatever it takes to get a part, right? But I was so fascinated."

"I'm like, 'Okay, did his agent tell him to paint his face when he left? Did he do it at home or did he do it in the bathroom? If he did it at home, did it increase his chances of getting pulled over by the cops?' All of these thoughts are going through my head."

Despite his surprise, Penn said that he actually made small talk with the actor that day and hung out with him a few times afterward. But he also said it motivated him more than ever to get the role. "Telling it now, you're like, 'Oh my God, people

did brownface,'" Penn said.

"Like the new 'Aladdin' a couple of years ago had brownface with a bunch of extras, right? So, it does still happen, obviously in a totally different way, but it was common enough, right? But I do remember looking at him while we're making small talk and, in my head, just saying to myself, 'He is not allowed to get that part.'"

Directed by Walt Becker, the film stars Ryan Reynolds as the title character, alongside Tara Reid, Tim Matheson and Paul Gleason.

The comedy centered on Vance "Van" Wilder, a popular, charismatic seventh-year senior at Coolidge College who has no intention of graduating and leaving his comfortable life as a party organizer and student mentor. (IANS)

**Armaan Malik Has A Fanboy Moment Meeting John Mayer**

LOS ANGELES, CA – Singer Armaan Malik had a fanboy moment as he finally met American singer-songwriter John Mayer, whom he credits as the reason he first picked up a guitar.

Armaan shared his excitement about meeting the Grammy-winning musician and described it as a "full circle moment." He also shared a picture posing with the 'You're Gonna Live Forever in Me' hitmaker.

Posting about the interaction, he wrote, "Finally met the man who made me want to pick up a guitar in the first place! Full circle moment @JohnMayer."

Mayer's first two studio albums, 'Room for Squares' and 'Heavier Things', were both met with critical and commercial success.

The single 'Your Body Is a Wonderland' won Best Male Pop Vocal Performance at the

45th Annual Grammy Awards, while 'Heavier Things' peaked atop the Billboard 200.

Outside of his solo career, Mayer has produced and provided music for various artists spanning multiple genres, including Frank Ocean, Kanye West, Travis Scott, Alicia Keys, Jack Harlow, Ed Sheeran, Shawn Mendes, Harry Styles, Daniel Caesar, Khalid, Jhené Aiko and Barbra Streisand, among others.

Armaan made his debut as a child singer in 2007 with the song 'Bum Bum Bole' for Aamir Khan's 'Taare Zameen Par'. In 2011, he made his primary on-screen appearance in the film 'Kaccha Limboo'.

Ever since then, he has delivered several memorable numbers that remain popular with music lovers. The younger brother of Amaal Mallik, Armaan was born to Daboo Malik and Jyoti Malik. (IANS)

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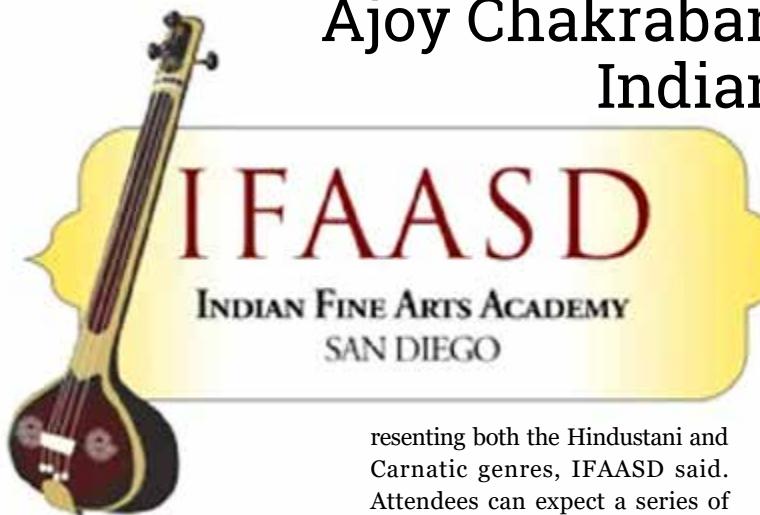
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MUSIC

Ajoy Chakrabarty, T.M. Krishna, Sowmya To Headline Indian Classical Fest In San Diego



India-West News Desk

LA JOLLA, CA – The Indian Fine Arts Academy of San Diego (IFAASD) is set to host its 19th annual Music and Dance Festival from March 23 through 29, at the Jewish Community Center, here.

This year's event features a prestigious lineup of world-renowned vocalists and instrumentalists rep-

resenting both the Hindustani and Carnatic genres, IFAASD said. Attendees can expect a series of concerts showcasing the virtuosity of the flute and violin, alongside unique Carnatic-Carnatic jugalbandhi performances and Hindustani instrumental sets. The festival will also highlight India's most talented percussionists on instruments including the mridangam, kanjira, tabla, and ghatam.

The 2024 roster includes legendary names such as Padma Bhushan

Ajoy Chakrabarty, Pt. Anindo Chatterjee, and Sangita Kalanidhi Dr. S. Sowmya, T.M. Krishna, and Dr. T. Bakthavatsalam.

Other featured artists include Neyveli Santhanagopalan, Guru Malladi Suri Babu, Vid Vishakha Hari, Kartik Seshadri, and Rakesh Chaurasia.

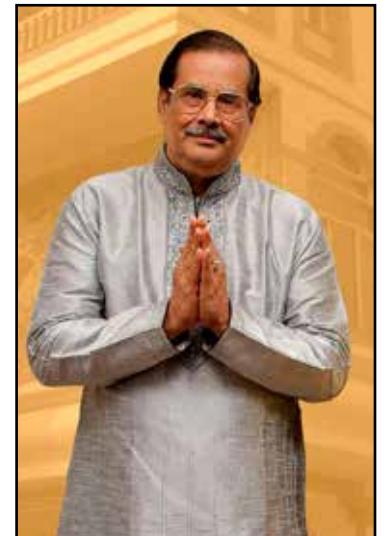
In addition to the musical showcases, IFAASD is also presenting classical dance productions in Bharathanatyam, Kuchipudi, Kathak, and Odissi, choreographed by leading dancers from India and America.

A significant portion of the festival is dedicated to honoring musical legacies, including the 106th birthday celebration of Bharat Ratna Ravi Shankar and the 100th birth centenary of Flute Mali.

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Ajoy Chakrabarty

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Badshah Visits LA

Contd. from P1

February 13 at the Kia Forum here, saw the musician transition from a lifelong basketball enthusiast to an active player on one of the sport's most high-profile entertainment stages. Badshah told his followers that while he had always hoped to see an NBA court in person, the

reality exceeded his expectations. "Always wanted to see an NBA basketball court live at least once in my life. And when it finally happened... I didn't even see the court, I walked straight onto it to play," he wrote, describing the moment as the realization of a childhood dream.

Previously Bollywood superstar

Ranveer Singh had had turn at the NBA All-Star in 2022 and 2023 in Cleveland and Salt Lake City.

Badshah teamed up with actor Simu Liu and creator Cody Jones. The team was mentored by a diverse coaching staff featuring Emmy-winning actor Anthony Anderson, alongside renowned

trainers Chris Brickley and Chris "Lethal Shooter" Matthews. They faced an opposing roster led by comedian Keegan-Michael Key, which included Olympic sprinter Andre De Grasse, NFL star Amon-Ra St. Brown, music producer DJ Mustard, and football legend Cafu.

Prior to the tip-off, Badshah de-

scribed the league to the media as a "dream world," making his participation a deeply personal milestone. He emphasized that his presence was intended to break boundaries and create "new firsts," while carrying the energy of Indian fans and the domestic hip-hop scene onto a global platform.

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MUSIC

Famed Musician Abhijit Banerjee Battles Aggressive Brain Tumor In SoCal; Fundraiser Appeal

India-West Staff Reporter

LOMA LINDA, CA – The music community is rallying behind renowned tabla maestro Abhijit Banerjee following his recent diagnosis of glioblastoma, a highly aggressive form of brain cancer. The celebrated musician and educator underwent emergency surgery this past November to remove a large tumor and is now facing a challenging road to recovery involving intensive radiation and chemotherapy.

A fundraising campaign has been established by friends and students to assist the family with the mounting costs of specialized medical care, therapy, and basic living expenses during this period of lost income. The appeal seeks to provide financial stability so that the maestro can focus entirely on his health without the burden of mounting debt.

The medical emergency has forced the immediate cancellation of Banerjee's upcoming concert tours in India and abroad, resulting in a total loss of livelihood for the working musician. His family, including his wife Suparna and son Tito,



Anyone wishing to support the artiste and his family can make their donations here:

www.gofundme.com/f/support-abhijit-banerjees-brain-cancer-battle

is now navigating a sudden and overwhelming transition. While Abhijit focuses on his grueling treatment plan, Suparna is learning to drive for the first time to manage medical appointments,

and Tito has taken on significant family responsibilities at a young age.

The health crisis began on November 16 when Banerjee sought medical attention after experiencing

persistent unsteadiness. He was admitted to Loma Linda University Medical Center, where imaging revealed a seven centimeter brain tumor. Surgeons performed a major operation just two days

later on November 18 to remove the mass, which pathology reports later confirmed as glioblastoma.

The diagnosis has sent shockwaves through the world of Indian classical music.

Banerjee, a disciple of the legendary Pandit Jnan Prakash Ghosh, is considered one of the leading tabla players of his generation. Over a prolific career spanning decades, he has accompanied nearly every major luminary of the genre, including Pandit Ravi Shankar and Pandit Shiv Kumar Sharma. His work extends beyond traditional boundaries into global fusion, collaborating with international artists and scoring award winning music for films.

In addition to his performance career, Banerjee is a dedicated philanthropist and teacher. He founded the Dhwani Academy of Percussion Music, which operates in Los Angeles and Kolkata, and has been a pioneer in providing musical education to visually challenged students in India.

Colleagues describe him as a humble artist who has spent his life enriching the cultural landscape of both Southern California and his native Bengal.

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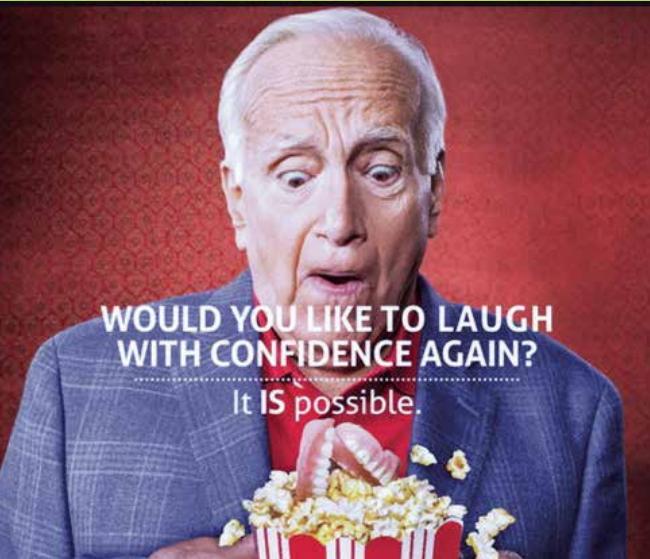


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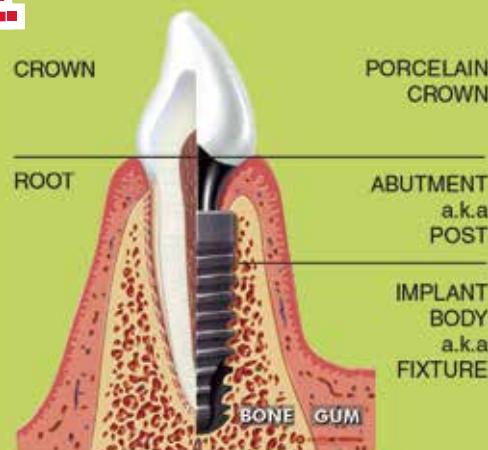


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