



WE WISH READERS A HAPPY VALENTINE'S DAY



"Love is an irresistible desire to be irresistibly desired." Robert Frost

'MY MEMORY IS FINE': JOE BIDEN HITS BACK AT SPECIAL COUNSEL OVER 'HAZY' AND 'POOR' AGE JIBE



Special counsel finds evidence Biden willfully mishandled classified info but no charges warranted. -Photo / Reuters

FEBRUARY 9, 2024

WASHINGTON, D.C. (TIP): A special counsel report released Thursday, February 8, found evidence that President Joe Biden willfully retained and shared highly classified information when he was a private citizen, including about military and foreign policy in Afghanistan, but concluded that criminal charges were not warranted, an AP report says.

The report from special counsel Robert Hur resolves a criminal investigation that had shadowed Biden's presidency for the last year. But its biting critical assessment of his handling of sensitive government records and unflattering characterizations of his memory will spark fresh questions about his competency and age that cut at voters' most deep-seated concerns about his candidacy for re-election.

Beyond that, the harsh findings will almost certainly blunt his ability to forcefully condemn Donald Trump, Biden's likely opponent in November's presidential election, over a criminal indictment charging the former president with illegally

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17th Lok Sabha propelled the country towards big changes, says PM Modi on last day of Lok Sabha

Refers to the resolution on the Ram Temple and removal of Article 370, praises Speaker Birla for running the House wisely

FEBRUARY 10, 2024

NEW DELHI (TIP): On the last day of the 17th Lok Sabha, Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his valedictory remarks described its five-year tenure of as a "period of reform, perform, and transform" that propelled the country towards big changes, adding that the country "will bless the 17th Lok Sabha".

"The country has moved towards big changes at a fast pace and all members of the House made an important contribution. Such works were completed for which people had waited for centuries," said Mr. Modi. This is the last session of the Lok Sabha before the general election, which too was touched upon by Mr. Modi stating that it may make a few nervous but it was an

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi speaks in the Lok Sabha during the Budget session of Parliament, in New Delhi, on February 10, 2024. -Photo / PTI

Nawaz Sharif, Bilawal Bhutto begin parleys to keep Imran Khan away from power as Pakistan poll results drag on



FEBRUARY 10, 2024

ISLAMABAD (TIP): Even as final results of the Pakistan general elections are awaited, PTI founder Imran Khan and PML(N) supremo Nawaz Sharif have claimed win and delivered victory speeches.

Now, since PML(N) has failed to get majority in the polls but has emerged as the "single largest party", it is in talks with PPP chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, Dawn reported.

On Friday night, former president Asif Ali Zardari and Bilawal met with former prime minister and PML(N) President Shehbaz Sharif in Lahore and exchanged views on government formation, Radio Pakistan reported.

Both parties have agreed to work together to achieve political and economic stability in the country, it added. (Source: IANS)

Nawaz Sharif of PML(N) and Bilawal Bhutto Zardari of PPP hold talks for alliance to form govt

Donald Trump wins Nevada, Virgin Islands caucuses

FEBRUARY 9, 2024

WASHINGTON, D.C. (TIP): Donald Trump won Republican presidential nominating caucuses in Nevada and the US Virgin Islands on Thursday, February 8, moving closer to becoming his party's White House standard-bearer in a likely general election rematch with US President Joe Biden in November. -File photo

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Donald Trump won Republican presidential nominating caucuses in Nevada and the US Virgin Islands on Thursday, February 8, moving closer to becoming his party's White House standard-bearer in a likely general election rematch with US President Joe Biden in November. -File photo



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**COMMENT****Love in the Land of Contradictions: Valentine's Day and the Paradox of Hindu Fundamentalism**BY  
INDRAJIT SALUJA

In recent times, India has witnessed a perplexing phenomenon where certain Hindu groups, often described as militant, vehemently oppose the celebration of Valentine's Day. This opposition is rooted in the claim that the celebration is an alien import conflicting with Indian values. Shockingly, this opposition has escalated to physical assaults on young men and women expressing their love on Valentine's Day. In a country where ancient temples like Khajuraho proudly depict explicit sexual scenes in stone carvings and where the Kama Shastra, the guide to sexual pleasure, originated, the contradiction between the celebration of love and the rise of conservative sentiments is glaring.

India has a rich cultural and historical heritage that celebrates love in various forms. The temples of Khajuraho, dating back to the medieval period, boast intricate carvings that boldly depict scenes of lovemaking and sensuality.

These sculptures are a testament to the acceptance of love and the human experience in ancient Indian society. Additionally, the Kama Sutra, an ancient Sanskrit text, serves as a guide to the art of love and sexual pleasure, highlighting the acknowledgment of the natural and intimate aspects of human relationships.

Given this historical backdrop, the opposition to the celebration of Valentine's Day by certain Hindu groups appears paradoxical. Love, in all its forms, is deeply embedded in India's cultural roots. It is baffling to witness a mindset that deems the expression of love on Valentine's Day as contrary to Indian values. Love, after all, is a universal emotion that transcends cultural boundaries.

The growing opposition to Valentine's Day reflects a broader trend of Hindu fundamentalism gaining prominence in India. This mindset, characterized by a rigid interpretation of Hindu values, tends to reject any cultural influence perceived as foreign. The clash between this fundamentalism and the liberal ethos of a majority of the population is becoming increasingly evident.

The rise of Hindu fundamentalism poses a threat to the rational thinking

and open-mindedness that have been central to India's progress. The assault on individuals celebrating Valentine's Day is not just an attack on a particular celebration but reflects a broader attempt to curtail personal freedoms and dictate cultural norms. If left unchecked, this trend could push India back into a regressive medievalism, stifling individual expression and diversity.

To maintain a harmonious and progressive society, it is crucial for India to embrace diversity and promote tolerance. Love, in all its expressions, should be celebrated rather than condemned. The country's historical openness to various facets of human experience, as evident in Khajuraho and the Kama Sutra, should serve as a reminder of the acceptance that has been an integral part of India's cultural fabric.

India's strength lies in its pluralistic identity, where various cultures, traditions, and beliefs coexist. The current wave of opposition to Valentine's Day threatens to erode this rich tapestry. It is essential for the majority of the population, which values liberal thinking, to resist the encroachment of fundamentalist ideologies and preserve the essence of India's inclusive heritage.

**GUEST COMMENT****Unsafe in the US : Five Indian students dead in five weeks**

The fabled American dream is turning out to be a nightmare for one Indian student after another. Syed Mazahir Ali was chased and attacked by unidentified men near his house in Chicago on February 4. The incident has left Ali, who moved to the US from Hyderabad about six months ago, traumatized. The attack comes less than three weeks after another student, Vivek Saini, who had recently received an MBA degree, was hammered to death by a homeless drug addict in Lithonia (Georgia). Sameer Kamath of Purdue University, Indiana, was found dead this week; according to the authorities, he died from a self-inflicted gunshot wound. Another Purdue student, Neel Acharya, was confirmed dead days after being reported missing, while Akul Dhawan, an 18-year-old who was studying at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, was found dead last month. The death of Shreyas Reddy (19) was reported last week.

The succession of tragic incidents has raised concerns about the safety and security of Indian students in America. These youngsters, whose parents have spent huge sums of money to send them to the US, are being targeted by petty criminals and drug users/traffickers. There are reports that stress caused by the lack of employment opportunities is pushing some of them to the brink - they are taking drugs or trying to end their lives.

The worrisome situation calls for greater efforts by the Indian community and diplomatic staff in America to reach out to the students and help them cope with myriad problems. They also need to build pressure on law enforcement agencies to probe the cases in a time-bound manner. Exemplary action against the culprits, including those in uniform, can send out a strong message of zero tolerance to crime. Last year's Seattle incident, in which a police officer made insensitive remarks over the death of university student Jaahnavi Kandula, showed that the rot ran deep. The US media, which is quick to highlight any kind of hate crime in India, needs to give due attention to the plight of Indian students.

(Tribune, India)

**Pakistan polls : Candidates backed by Imran's party make gains**

Independent candidates backed by jailed former Prime Minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) sprung a surprise in the general election, upstaging three-time premier Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N). Even as the counting of votes and declaration of winners were marked by chaos and delays, Nawaz suffered a shock defeat to PTI-supported Shahzada Khan from the Mansehra seat. He, however, defeated another independent candidate, Yasmin Rashid, to clinch the Lahore seat.

Members of the PTI contested as independents after they were not allowed to use the party symbol (cricket bat) in the February 8 polls, which were held amid a controversial nationwide mobile phone shutdown. The provisional results show that cricketer-turned-politician Imran, the founding chairman of the PTI, has made his presence felt despite being barred from contesting the elections due to his conviction and sentencing in multiple cases. Imran, who was ousted as PM in 2022, continues to be a popular leader. His arrest in May last year had sparked violence in many parts of the country; protesters had even targeted military installations, including the army headquarters in Rawalpindi.

The PTI's success is a setback to the Pakistani military, which had thrown its weight behind the Sharifs and gone all out to keep Imran out of the electoral contest. Confident of forming the government at the Centre, Imran's party has ruled out forging an alliance with its main rivals - the PML-N and Bilawal Bhutto Zardari's Pakistan People's Party. Meanwhile, PML-N leader Ishaq Dar has claimed that some victorious independent candidates have contacted his party. An intriguing power tussle has begun in the beleaguered country, which is hoping for a stable and strong government that would pull it out of a prolonged economic crisis.

(Tribune, India)

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## 5 INDIAN-ORIGIN PEOPLE ARRESTED IN CANADA FOR EXTORTION TARGETING SOUTH ASIAN BUSINESSES

**They have been identified as Gagan Ajit Singh, 23, Anmoldeep Singh, 23, Hashmeet Kaur, 25, Iyamjot Kaur, 21, and Arundeeep Thind, 39**



The Peel Regional Police launched the EITF in December last year in response to a wave of South Asian business owners reporting threats of violence against them and their families. - Photo for representation

**FEBRUARY 8, 2024**

**TORONTO (TIP):** A specialized Canadian police task force has arrested five people, including two women of Indian-origin for alleged extortion and firearm-related offences targeting the South Asian business community in the Greater Toronto area.

The Peel Regional Police Extortion Investigative Task Force (EITF), with the support of the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP), executed a search warrant resulting in the arrest of four individuals, Gagan Ajit Singh, 23, Anmoldeep Singh, 23, Hashmeet Kaur, 25, Iyamjot Kaur, 21, and Arundeeep Thind, 39, according to a Peel Regional Police press release on Wednesday.

While Gagan Ajit Singh, Hashmeet Kaur and Iyamjot Kaur belong to the Brampton area, Anmoldeep Singh belongs to Mississauga. They have been charged with extortion, unauthorised possession of a firearm, unauthorised possession of prohibited or restricted weapon, and fraud, among other offences. The fifth suspect, Arundeeep Thind, has no fixed address and has been charged with extortion.

The Peel Regional Police launched the EITF in December last year in response to a wave of South Asian business owners reporting threats of violence against them and their families if they didn't pay money, according to a CBC News report.

Superintendent Shelley Thompson, who heads the unit, at a news conference on Wednesday, said a total of 24 charges have been laid in relation to the 29 extortion attempts under investigation. Thompson said in nine of those instances, guns were fired at unoccupied businesses, according to the Toronto Star newspaper.

(Read full story at [www.theindianpanorama.enws](http://www.theindianpanorama.enws))

# Indian-origin Australian Senator Varun Ghosh takes oath on Bhagavad Gita

**FEBRUARY 7, 2024**

**CANBERRA (TIP):** Barrister Varun Ghosh became the first ever India-born member of the Australian Parliament to take oath on Bhagavad Gita.

Varun Ghosh from Western Australia has been appointed as the newest Senator after the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council chose him to represent the Australian state in the Senate of the Federal Parliament.

Welcoming Varun Ghosh, Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong said, "Wonderful to have you on the Labor Senate team."

"Welcome to Varun Ghosh, our newest Senator from Western Australia. Senator Ghosh is the first ever Australian Senator sworn in on the Bhagavad Gita. I have often said, when you're the first at something, you've got to make sure you're not the last," the Minister posted on X.

She added, "I know Senator Ghosh will be a strong voice for his community and for West Australians."

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese also wished Varun Ghosh. "Welcome Varun Ghosh, our newest Senator from Western Australia. Fantastic to have you on the team," he posted on X.



Barrister Varun Ghosh became the first ever India-born member of the Australian Parliament to take oath on Bhagavad Gita.

Taking to X, the Legislative Assembly of Western Australia said, "The Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council have chosen Senator Varun Ghosh to represent Western Australia in the Senate of the Federal Parliament."

Varun Ghosh is a lawyer from Perth. He received degrees in Arts and Law from the University of Western Australia and was a Commonwealth Scholar in Law at the University of Cambridge. He previously worked as a finance attorney in New York and as a consultant for the World Bank in Washington, DC.

The political journey of Varun Ghosh began when he joined Australia's Labor Party in Perth. He was just 17 when his parents moved from India in the 1980s.

"I have had the privilege of a good education and believe strongly that high-quality education and training should be available to everyone," Varun Ghosh said in a statement.

For the past few years, Ghosh has worked as a barrister, dealing with legal matters in Western Australia and internationally with the World Bank.

In the 2019 federal election, Ghosh was placed fifth on the Australian Labor Party's Senate ticket in Western Australia but was not elected.

Born in 1985, Ghosh moved to Perth in 1997 and attended Christ Church Grammar School.

He has been actively involved in public service, reflecting his commitment to high-quality education.

Before his current role, Ghosh worked as a finance attorney in New York and as a consultant for the World Bank in Washington, DC.

He returned to Australia in 2015, working with King & Wood Mallesons, dealing with legal matters for banks, resource companies, and construction companies.

## Canadian police arrest 2 teens after shooting incident at house of Hardeep Nijjar's associate



**FEBRUARY 9, 2024**

**SURREY, BC (TIP):** Two teenagers have been arrested in connection with a shooting incident that occurred last week, targeting the home of a Sikh activist linked to pro-Khalistani leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar, a designated terrorist in India who was shot dead in Canada last year.

Multiple gunshots were fired in the incident, which occurred just after 1.20 am on February 1 at the South Surrey home of Simranjeet Singh.

The Surrey unit of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) said on Thursday that their Serious Crime Unit executed a search warrant on a residence in the 7700-block of 140 Street on February 6.

"Police seized three firearms and multiple electronic devices during the search. Two 16-year-old males from Surrey were arrested for careless use of a firearm and discharging a firearm with intent," Surrey RCMP Corporal Sarbjit K Sangha said in a statement.

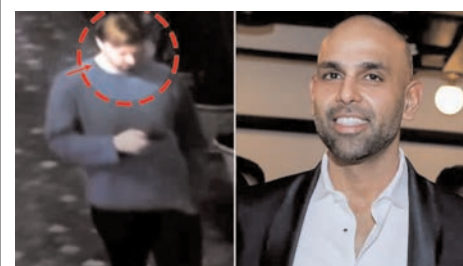
While the two have been released without charges, police said that investigators continue to gather information on the case to determine the motivation behind the shooting.

"Surrey RCMP takes threats and acts of violence seriously and we work closely with victims to ensure their continued safety," Sangha said.

(Read full story at [www.theindianpanorama.enws](http://www.theindianpanorama.enws))

## Indian-origin executive dies after being assaulted in US; suspect on the run, police release

**A reward of up to \$25,000 is being offered by police to anyone who can provide information that leads to arrest of suspects involved**



41-year-old Taneja was the cofounder and president of Dynamo Technologies

**FEBRUARY 10, 2024**

**WASHINGTON, D.C. (TIP):** In yet another disturbing incident, a 41-year-old Indian-origin executive died in the US, days after he was assaulted during an altercation outside a

restaurant in downtown Washington.

According to investigators, officers responded to the 1100 block of 15th Street Northwest outside Shoto Restaurant around 2 am for an assault on February 2.

Once officers arrived, they found Vivek Taneja on the pavement. He was taken to the hospital with life-threatening injuries.

A preliminary investigation found that Taneja and an unknown man were involved in a verbal argument that turned physical, WUSA, a television station in Washington, DC, affiliated with CBS, said.

Taneja was knocked to the ground and hit his head on the pavement.

He died from his injuries at the hospital on Wednesday. Police are now investigating Taneja's death as a homicide.

Taneja was the cofounder and president of Dynamo Technologies. According to the company's website, Taneja "leads Dynamo's strategic, growth, and partnership initiatives, with an emphasis on the federal government contracting arena." Police continue to search for the man who threw the deadly punch. He was captured on surveillance camera.

(Read full story at [www.theindianpanorama.enws](http://www.theindianpanorama.enws))

# Indian American executive Sonia Fernandes named Politico's first global HR, diversity officer

FEBRUARY 5, 2024

WASHINGTON, D.C. (TIP): Indian American Sonia Fernandes has been named as the global chief human resources and diversity officer of Politico, a Washington-based digital newspaper focused on politics.

"In this new role, she will be responsible for leading, integrating and harmonizing Politico's talent functions across continents," the publication announced Feb 1 noting that the function will be centralized globally for the first time in its 17-year history.

Based in Politico's Rosslyn, Virginia headquarters, India-born, Mumbai-educated Fernandes will begin her new role on Feb 8.

"Fernandes will drive positive change that will impact and elevate the well-being, professional growth and experience of every Politico across seven newsrooms, two continents and seven time zones," the publication said.

Fernandes' dual role as chief diversity officer reflects Politico's commitment to fostering a diverse, inclusive and empowering workplace in line with its ambition for additional global growth, it

added.

"Politico's success is driven by great journalism and great people," said Mark Dekan, chief operating officer of Politico Media Group. "Sonia brings a wealth of international experience and a fresh perspective to Politico. Her role is integral to building upon Politico's track record as the most successful news start-up of the 21st century as we grow into a top global brand."

"It is a privilege to join Politico, an iconic brand dedicated to purpose-driven work with people at its heart," said Fernandes. "I look forward to the exciting journey ahead and the limitless possibilities we'll create together as a team."

Fernandes brings over two decades of expertise in HR management and transformative change to her new role. She is seasoned in shaping organizational, cultural and talent ecosystems to drive business growth, the announcement stated.

She was most recently the chief people officer for the MediaCom Asia Pacific division of WPP, a global advertising agency, and was responsible for the well-being of 2,500 employees across 15

countries.

Her extensive career spans global entities such as KPMG, Bain & Co., the BBC and MediaCom, where she spearheaded progressive HR strategies with a focus on design and execution.

Having lived and worked in New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Australia, Singapore and India, Fernandes possesses deep knowledge in international HR. She has expertise in integrating cross-border HR strategies and operating models to align with commercial objectives, according to the publication.

Fernandes' deep commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) will serve her as Politico's first chief diversity officer. Balancing local needs with global scalability, she champions a "people-first, better results" approach, fostering a human-centric and high-performing culture.

She is a collaborative force in driving diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, having designed and implemented 75 grassroots programs across 15 countries, Politico said.

Additionally, she has played a key role in leading M&As from due diligence to



Sonia Fernandes has been named as the global chief human resources and diversity officer of Politico, a Washington-based digital newspaper focused on politics.

integration, implementing strategic talent-mapping programs and overseeing large-scale recruitment projects.

Born in India, Fernandes holds a BA in psychology and sociology from The University of Mumbai and a master's in management and employment relations from The University of Auckland, New Zealand.

## Indian-origin judge Sanket Jayshukh Bulsara nominated by Joe Biden to US Court for Eastern District of New York



Sanket Jayshukh Bulsara has been nominated by President Biden for the United States District Court for the Eastern District of New York

FEBRUARY 9, 2024

WASHINGTON, D.C. (TIP): President Joe Biden has nominated Indian-origin judge Sanket Jayshukh Bulsara, an expert in securities, contract, bankruptcy and regulatory matters, for the United States District Court for the Eastern District of New York.

A child of immigrants from India and Kenya, Bulsara, 46, has been a US Magistrate Judge for the Eastern District of New York since 2017. He was the first South Asian American federal judge to serve on any court in the Second Circuit when he was appointed as a Magistrate Judge.

The White House announced Bulsara's nomination on Thursday as Biden named the 45th round of judicial nominees, which included four individuals to federal district courts. All of them are extraordinarily qualified, experienced and devoted to the rule of law and the Constitution, a media statement said.

"These choices also continue to fulfil the President's promise to ensure that the nation's courts reflect the diversity that is one of our greatest assets as a country-both in terms of personal and professional backgrounds," the White House said.

From January 2017 to May 2017, Bulsara served as the Acting General Counsel of the US Securities and Exchange Commission, where he had been the Deputy General Counsel for Appellate Litigation, Adjudication, and Enforcement since 2015.

## An Indian American pilot and two others die in Florida plane crash



The crash site

FEBRUARY 4, 2024

TAMPA, FL(TIP):

Indian American Jemin Patel tragically lost his life, along with two others, when the single-engine Beechcraft Bonanza V35 he was

piloting crashed into a

mobile home park in Clearwater, Florida, last Thursday, February 2.

The victims of the devastating crash included Patel, aged 54, and two women who were inside one of the mobile homes at the time of the accident. Clearwater officials identified the two women as Martha Parry, an 86-year-old resident of the mobile home park, and Mary Ellen Pender, aged 54, according to the local media. Following the crash, which occurred around 7 pm, a fire engulfed four mobile homes within the park. It was reported that Patel had notified authorities of an engine failure shortly before the plane descended and crashed into the mobile home park.

This tragic incident serves as a somber reminder of the unpredictable nature of aviation accidents and their far-reaching consequences. The ill-fated aircraft had departed earlier that day from Vero Beach Regional Airport, located approximately 34 miles from Melbourne Beach. According to Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) aircraft registry records, the plane is registered to Control Data Inc. of Indianapolis.

The FAA reported that Patel, who was the sole person on board, had communicated an engine failure. Both the FAA and the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) will investigate the crash, with the NTSB taking the lead and providing any updates.

The Clearwater Fire & Rescue Department, the first agency to respond to the incident, stated on the X platform that they received the crash call at 7:08 PM that evening, and their officers arrived at the scene by 7:15 PM.

Patel, a licensed pilot, was described as "a well-known and trusted figure in the skies above Melbourne Beach" in an obituary featured on a website.

## Indian American Satwinder Kaur elected Kent City Council president for a 2-year term



Satwinder Kaur has been unanimously elected president of the Kent City Council for a two-year term

FEBRUARY 9, 2024

KENT, WASHINGTON (TIP): The Kent City Council in Washington has unanimously elected Indo-American Satwinder Kaur as its president for a two-year term.

In her new role, Kaur, who is in her seventh year on the council, replaces Bill Boyce who nominated her for the top position, according to a media report.

"You've got some little shoes to fill. I'm sure you will do a great job and we are here to support you and make sure you are very successful," Boyce said after Kaur's election in a February 6 meeting.

Thanking Boyce for mentoring her, Kaur said: "As I start this, I know all of us have the same goal of serving the community and making sure Kent is a better place for all of us."

(Read full story at [www.theindianpanorama.enws](http://www.theindianpanorama.enws))

# Dr. Inderpal Singh Chhabra Takes Over as President of AAPI-QLI



Dr. Inderpal Singh Chhabra poses for a photograph with gavel

**FEBRUARY 2, 2024**  
**LONG ISLAND, NY (TIP):** Eminent

physician Dr. Inderpal Singh Chhabra has taken over as President of AAPI-QLI, a chapter of national AAPI.

AAPI of Queens and Long Island is a Not-for-Profit Organization, representing all Physicians of Indian Origin in Queens and Long Island, NY. It was started in June 1995, under the leadership of Dr. Narendra Hadpawat.

AAPI Queens and Long Island (AAPIQLI) represents the interests of all physicians of Indian Origin in its area including providing Continuous Medical Education (CME) and engaging in charitable activities for the benefit of our community at large. Since its inception there has always been a strong alliance with and support from National AAPI, the largest ethnic Physicians Organization in USA

According to the information available on the AAPI-QLI website, this "organization has been growing rapidly in membership and is well accepted by all other local and national professional organizations. From the very beginning

the leadership has put heavy emphasis on transparency and the democratic process, which are the main ingredients for its enormous success. AAPI of Queens and Long Island currently represents over 800 active physicians and donates more than \$60,000 annually for charitable purposes. It is also, one of the largest chapters of National AAPI. AAPI-QLI is a vibrant chapter of AAPI. Namaste and a heartfelt welcome to this distinguished assembly at AAPIQLI. It is a privilege to stand before you today as we applaud the progress and dedication of the Indian medical community thriving in Queens and Long Island."

In his presidential speech, Dr. Chhabra emphasized on the mission and vision of the organization.

"In the vast landscape of healthcare, we honor the unwavering pursuit of knowledge by our colleagues. The collaborative endeavors of our colleagues pave the way for transformative breakthroughs. Let us acknowledge and celebrate the spirit of cooperation

propelling medical progress.

Let's be mindful that we operate in the United States, our karma Bhoomi. Addressing public health necessitates championing preventive measures and community engagement. AAPIQLI is proud to host and sponsor a number of Health fairs in our communities.

In my role as President of this esteemed organization, I am committed to bringing you education on cutting-edge healthcare, including emerging technologies like artificial intelligence, to tackle the pressing issue such as physician burnout.

In conclusion, let this gathering catalyze continued collaboration, innovation, and advocacy in the field of medicine. Together, we can shape a healthier and more resilient future for our communities.

Thank you, and may our shared commitment to health and healing propel us to new heights in the service of humanity. Jai Hind and God bless America!"

## Governor Hochul announces new law to clarify disclosure of credit card surcharges goes into effect Sunday, February 11



Governor Kathy Hochul

File photo

**FEBRUARY 6, 2024**

**ALBANY, NY (TIP):** Governor Kathy Hochul today announced a new consumer protection law that will go into effect on February 11, 2024. This new law will amend and clarify New York's existing credit card surcharge law. The NYS Division of Consumer Protection assists aggrieved consumers in the marketplace and the New York State Attorney General and local governments have the authority to enforce the credit card surcharge law. The New York State Department of State's Division of Consumer Protection recommends that interested localities review DCP's Credit Card Surcharge Legal Update Letter for more information.

"New Yorkers should never have to deal with hidden credit card costs, and this law will ensure individuals can trust that their purchases will not result in surprise surcharges," Governor Hochul said. "Transparency is crucial in

building trust between businesses and communities and now patrons will be empowered to budget accordingly."

The law, signed by Governor Hochul on December 13, 2023, provides greater transparency and protections for consumers by:

Limiting credit card surcharges to the amount charged to the business by the credit card company; and Requiring businesses to post before checkout: the total price of an item or service inclusive of the credit card surcharge; or a two-tiered pricing option, which requires the credit card price to be posted alongside the cash price.

New York Secretary of State Robert J. Rodriguez said, "New Yorkers using credit cards have a right to know the total cost of the purchase, inclusive of any surcharge, before they reach the register. This new law signed by Governor Hochul will offer clarity and provide transparency to both the consumer and business owners about the surcharges when using a credit card."

State Senator Jeremy Cooney said, "Transparency in pricing is critical so people can make informed decisions when spending their hard-earned money. Requiring businesses to disclose credit card surcharges helps consumers better understand the total cost. Thank you, Governor Hochul, for signing this bill into law to protect consumers."

Read full story at  
[www.theindianpanorama.news](http://www.theindianpanorama.news)

## Suoizzi Holds Press Conference Calling Out Pilip's Outrageous Partisan Stance on Bipartisan Border Bill

**FEBRUARY 5, 2024**

**GLEN COVE, NY (TIP):** Former Congressman Tom Suozzi, today, held a press conference in response to his opponent, Mazi Pilip, taking an outrageous partisan stance and siding with her extreme GOP party bosses in the House and their mission to play politics with people's lives by coming out against the Senate's bipartisan border deal.

The Senate's bill is the toughest and fairest set of reforms to secure the border our country has had in decades. It would make our country safer, make our border more secure, and treat people fairly and humanely while preserving legal immigration, consistent with our values as a nation.

Yet Pilip called this bipartisan legislation: "the legalization of the invasion of our county." During the press conference, Suozzi underscored that the reason Pilip is opposing the bill is because she's completely beholden to the national Republicans. And like them, she's only interested in playing politics with people's lives instead of actually working to solve problems.

"It's incomprehensible to me that a candidate can claim that her number one priority is securing the border yet takes a dead-on-arrival approach on the only compromise border bill that has had a chance of passing our Congress over the past 30 years," said Suozzi.

"This isn't the first time Pilip has proven she's beholden to the extreme wing of her



"Pilip shows every day that she'll go to Congress to cause problems, not solve them": Suozzi

File photo

party. She's aligned with some of the most dangerous members of the Republican Party, who are all also on board with opposing this bipartisan border deal because they think it will help them politically, even if it's at the expense of the people. People are sick of these political games that Mazi Pilip and her DC handlers are playing, and I will work with whoever it takes to get people to come together to actually get

stuff done and fix our border."

This isn't the first time Pilip has proven she's beholden to the extreme wing of her party. In a CNN interview over the weekend, in a complete flip-flop from the past two months, Pilip wholeheartedly embraces Trump even if he's convicted of a crime. She claimed he is innocent of the 91 criminal charges against him. And she dismissed the fact that Trump led the insurrection of our nation's Capitol on January 6th.

Meanwhile, Suozzi has built his entire life in public service by working with anyone to get things done for the people, especially on immigration. In 2019, he worked across the aisle with Peter King to put forth bipartisan solutions to fix our border. Suozzi has long called for investments in border security while supporting a pathway to citizenship for people who follow the rules.

In 2018, not only was he one of 18 Democrats to support funding ICE, but Suozzi was critical of the far-left in his party who wanted to abolish them.

# Consul General of India at New York interacts with Indian community members



Consul General Binaya S. Pradhan (right) and Dr. Varun Jeph, Deputy Consul General at the meeting with Indian Community members on February 2.  
Photo / courtesy Nitin Vyas



A view of the Indian community members at the meeting

Photo / courtesy Nitin Vyas

**FEBRUARY 2, 2024**

**NEW YORK CITY (TIP):** Consul General Binaya S. Pradhan, with his deputy Dr. Varun Jeph on his side, held an interaction with Indian community

members on February 2, 2024. The meeting was one of the several planned to know the community.

Mr. Pradhan welcomed the members of the Indian community and emphasized

the need for a continued interaction between the community organizations and the Consulate.

While the meeting was a "let's know each other", some members made

suggestions on certain issues. The Consul General welcomed the suggestions and encouraged them to share with the Consulate their thoughts and ideas.

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# The decline of America's leadership

Washington is failing to use its leverage in the international environment



BY KRISHNAN  
SRINIVASAN

**"ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN VALUES, AND WASHINGTON IS FAILING TO LEVERAGE ITS STANDING IN THE INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT, THEREBY EMPOWERING POLARIZATION POLITICALLY, ECONOMICALLY AND CULTURALLY. THE U.S. WITHDREW FROM THE TRANS-PACIFIC PARTNERSHIP THAT EMPHASIZED HUMAN RIGHTS, TRANSPARENCY AND LIBERAL DEMOCRACY, AND ALSO FROM MANY OTHER INTERNATIONAL OBLIGATIONS. WHILE IT SOUGHT INTERNATIONAL DOMINANCE, DOMESTIC POLARIZATION INDUCED IDEOLOGICAL SEPARATION, RENDERING COOPERATION IN ITS TWO-PARTY SYSTEM NON-EXISTENT."**

The traditional strengths of America are its values platform, its military power, its pivotal position in the global financial system, and as a technology pioneer. The energetic pro-American lobby in India advocates ever-closer engagement with the United States, rejecting arguments about its diminishing influence.

This is contradicted by authoritative commentators such as Ian Bremmer ("The US is already the world's most divided and dysfunctional advanced industrial democracy"), Laura Kuenssberg ("Western leaders in 2024 [are] grappling with a world where other dominant countries are less attached to conventional international rules") and Andrew Whitehead ("America's democracy seems to have lost the ability to renew itself") with former U.S. President Donald Trump and current President Joe Biden in the race for a



The American wars in Afghanistan and Iraq dissipated America's credibility'

second presidential term.

These experts are supported by Jonathan Freedland ("Not for nothing is there serious concern in the US that January 2025 could open a new chapter of US authoritarianism, even an American dictatorship), Frank Gardner ("The past 12 months have seen a number of setbacks for the US, Europe and other major democracies on the international politics stage...they point to a shifting balance of power away from the US-dominated, Western values that have held sway for years. On many fronts, the wind is blowing in the wrong direction for Western interests") and Niall Ferguson ("The harsh reality is that the US is no longer very good at getting B to do something that B would not otherwise do") which is more than evident in Israel's Gaza war. Ferguson adds that in purchasing power parity, China, in 2023, had an economy that was a fifth larger than that of the U.S. To him American problems were illegal immigration and deficits in the rule of law, secondary education, public health, new technologies, and the national debt rising to \$32 trillion.

After the Second World War, the U.S. shaped the rules-based international system. A rules-based order is an abstract concept; in practice it was neither centered on rules nor was it entirely global. It was a power-based system established by the U.S. and its allies, and Washington considered itself exempt from its norms, particularly those prohibiting interference in the internal affairs of other countries. The American wars in Afghanistan and Iraq dissipated America's credibility due to its emphasis on military expeditionist, evidenced by about 750 military bases in 80 countries, though Al Jazeera says the number "may be even higher as not all

data is published by the Pentagon".

Actions speak louder than values, and Washington is failing to leverage its standing in the international environment, thereby empowering polarization politically, economically and culturally. The U.S. withdrew from the Trans-Pacific Partnership that emphasized human rights, transparency and liberal democracy, and also from many other international obligations. While it sought international dominance, domestic polarization induced ideological separation, rendering cooperation in its two-party system non-existent.

In the West and parts of Asia, open liberalism and globalization made links of community, family and society brittle, with many feeling excluded from economic progress. Individual freedom was juxtaposed against state, society and law, and the movements of people have resulted in a backlash against immigration, feeding populist movements.

The exercise of power is insufficient to be a dominant geopolitical player; legitimacy is also necessary. The most powerful leaders still crave legitimacy both at home and abroad.

There is now a shift in power equations, with challenges to the legitimacy of institutions and leaderships. Mr. Trump and his supporters openly question the validity of the U.S.'s electoral system. American soft power, such as its entertainment industry, which is non-government and unregulated, balances some negativity, as do enduring alliances in Southeast Asia and Europe, though U.S. complicity with Israel's violence against Palestinians has scrambled all its pre-existing policies in West Asia.

The leaders of China and Russia are

determined to maintain their authoritarian regimes and seek to reshape the international system, using trade, pressure and diasporic ties to obstruct the spread of western democratic values that have held sway for decades. In parts of Asia and Africa, western liberalism is often interpreted at worst as a smoke screen for neo-imperialism, and at best as an insensitive expression of American and European arrogance. And although there is no chance of dethroning the international financial settlement infrastructure soon, BRICS' policies seem to herald a contest between local currencies and the dollar because the risks in the current dollar-centric system are unacceptably high.

U.S.-China security and economic competition is the central issue in the world today, and will be potentially dangerous in the years to come. China campaigns to project power with traditional and non-traditional techniques, such as the Confucius Institutes, TikTok and gaming. Its prowess in high technology and geo-engineering inspire admiration, along with its programme of overseas infrastructure financing unmatched by any other country. Due to internal dissonance, the U.S. has failed to assume leadership in Artificial Intelligence when compared to China and the European Union, which are setting the standards.

Whether or not the U.S. remains "the indispensable nation", as former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright termed it, India should develop an advantageous relationship with America while keeping in mind its deficiencies.

(The author is a former  
Foreign Secretary of India)



# PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION: What are Indian American voters' priorities

The US presidential election is hotting up, and all bets are off on who will be the next resident of White House in 2025.

But what is it that the Indian American community is looking for:

A robust economy, safety and security of citizens, fixing the southern border crisis, and thriving relations with India are some of the demands put forth by the nearly four-million-strong Indian-American community as the US rolls up its sleeves for Ballot 2024.

Surprising many political voters, the community emerged as the most coveted bloc in the 2020 election with a record 71 per cent rate of voting among Asian Americans and ensuring President Joe Biden's victory.

At least 10 Indian-Americans, mostly Democrats, won local and state-level elections held in several parts of the country last year, reflecting the growing political prowess of the ethnic community.

For the first time in the history of the country, two Indian-American candidates - Nikki Haley and Vivek Ramaswamy - locked horns on the Republican presidential debate stage, giving a tough fight to former president and GOP frontrunner Donald Trump.

Yet, as aptly put by a Carnegie Endowment study, despite the rising political profile of Indian Americans, their political attitudes are woefully under-studied.

"Many Indian-Americans support fundraisers and personal affiliations to advance their concerns, yet, when the contestants get elected and take office, most promises fall on the sidelines, especially issues affecting the Indian American community," Nilima Madan, Vice President of The Association of Indians In America, told IANS.

President Joe Biden's major fundraisers included Indian-Americans, who helped raise at least \$100,000 for his campaign in 2020.

Topping the list of 800 major donors were community leaders like Swadesh Chatterjee, Ramesh Kapoor, Shekar N. Narasimhan, R. Rangaswami, Ajay Jain Bhutoria, Frank Islam, Neil Makhija and Bela Bajaria.

"What hits an American citizen is primarily the economy, their pride and disappointment, and how their life will be run by Republicans or Democrats," Madan said.

Comprising nearly 1 per cent of all registered voters in the US and representing 16 per cent of Asian-American voters, Indian-Americans are considered to be key players in battleground states like Florida, Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Nevada.

"In general, Indian-American voters, while supporting candidates for various positions, don't articulate their concerns, they don't candidly put their demands for the consideration of political



Donald Trump, Joe Biden, Nikki Haley

representatives," Ashok Vyas, a program director with New Jersey-based ITV Gold channel, told IANS.

"But for some time, general Indian-American voters are taking a lot of interest in Indian affairs and there is increased sensitivity towards Bharat," he said, adding that the electorate wants a fair portrayal of Indian culture and dharma for students.

In addition to wanting a "stronger government", the immediate concern of Indian-American voters, according to Vyas, is stability, safety, and law and order.

While the economy and healthcare are largely seen to influence the vote choice of Indian Americans, this time the community also wants the US to develop robust relations with India.

Parveen Chopra, founder of New York-based spirituality website, ALotusInTheMud.com, was at a fundraiser in Hicksville where prominent Indian-Americans mentioned better India-US relations and safety as their top concerns, in addition to "hordes of migrants poring through the southern border".

The crisis at the southern border has become a sore point in the 2024 US Presidential elections with a spike in the number of migrants entering the country through its Mexico border in recent years.

The US Customs and Border Protection released more than 2.3 million migrants into the country at the southern border under the Biden administration, allowing in the vast majority of migrant families and some adult groups, according to a recent Department of Homeland Security report.

An NYT report mentioned that there are now around 11 million undocumented immigrants inside the US - three times the

number that lived here in 1990 - straining the resources of cities like Denver, New York, and Chicago.

"One Democrat who even ran unsuccessfully for a county legislative seat said he is ready to vote Donald Trump this time, unhappy with open borders and migrant tent cities under Joe Biden," Chopra, former editor of New York-based daily, The South Asian Times, told IANS.

Vyas said that the chances of Trump returning as president cannot be ruled out.

"Donald Trump talked about building a wall and putting America first. These ideas are making him a popular choice. Will we have Trump as President again? This can't be ruled out," he said.

While Indian Americans have largely sided with the Democrats, Madan told IANS that it is more about choosing a "reliable American administration".

"Democrats or Republicans, no one votes for four years of unpredictability but chooses a reliable American administration."

While there was an initial wave of excitement among the community with the entry of Ramaswamy and Haley in the presidential race, Madan said that an individual's race or ethnicity itself is not a defining factor.

"Every election becomes another chance to participate and hope for a favorable outcome amid political polarizations. Although their diverse attitudes and attributes are dividing Indian American voters for the 2024 US Presidential elections, an individual's race or ethnicity itself is not a defining factor," Madan told IANS.

Haley, who continues to be in the Republican presidential race, launched her campaign by calling herself a

daughter of immigrants but has not garnered much support from the community.

"About Nikki Haley, Indians don't consider her a viable candidate - her being of Indian origin is not much in their equation," Chopra told IANS on being asked about the former South Carolina governor's chances against Trump.

Vyas said that "at this point, she doesn't seem to be holding any ground against former president Trump".

According to a Monmouth University-Washington Post poll released this week, Haley is trailing Trump by 26 points in her home state of South Carolina.

With the former president winning the two primary contests held so far, the 2024 presidential campaign appears to be inexorably heading towards a Trump-Biden rematch, with most voters wishing there were better candidates in the race.

Close to 74 per cent of Indian-American voters are thought to have backed Biden in 2020, according to a 2022 survey by AAPI (Asian American and Pacific Islander) data, compared to just 15 per cent supporting Trump.

Political experts believe that in 2024, much of those 74 per cent of the votes - comprising businessmen, corporate or tech professionals - are more likely to swing to the right as they favor lower tax rates.

The Affirmative Action at Harvard, anti-caste legislation in California, the Khalistan menace, growing attacks on Hindu temples, and fallout of the Israel-Hamas conflict on college campuses do not paint a pretty picture for the Hindus and other minorities.

Says Madan, "How all turns out is fluid until all know who is next, yet hopes for the best prevail". (Source: IANS)

# Piety hostage to power politics

**SUDDENLY, EVERYMAN BECOMES THE OTHER AND THEIR COMMON SENTIMENT IS FEAR**



BY RAJESH  
RAMACHANDRAN

**"The Mehrauli and Haldwani incidents do not endorse Yogi's statement asking for just three temples the way Krishna asked for five villages. Even the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML), the post-Independence remnant of Jinnah's Muslim League and the biggest party of the Muslims, had officially welcomed the consecration of the Ram temple at Ayodhya built after the demolition of the Babri Masjid. Two days after the event, the Kerala unit president of the IUML, Sayyid Sadiq Ali Shihab Thangal, termed the Ram Temple a reality and said: "We cannot go back from that. There is no need to protest against it. The temple came up based on a court order and the Babri Masjid is about to be constructed. These two are now part of India. The Ram Temple and the proposed Babri Masjid are two best examples that strengthen secularism in our country."**

The head of the powerful Gorakshapeeth denomination of the Nath tradition, who also happens to be the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, seems to have taken liberties with the Mahabharata in the context of the dispute over the Gyanvapi and Shahi Idgah mosques in Varanasi and Mathura, respectively. CM Yogi Adityanath invoked Krishna, saying in the UP legislative assembly that he is seeking just three religious places, like the Lord who had sought only five villages for the Pandavas, adding that when these villages were denied, the Mahabharata war became inevitable.

When two more mosques are being demanded, what is the guarantee that 20 more will not be demolished?

Well, Krishna, as the Pandava emissary to the Kaurava court, first asked for half the kingdom, then five villages, then one village, then five houses, then one house;



when he was told that the Pandavas would not be given a place even to put a needle and when the Kauravas tried to take Krishna a prisoner, his mission failed. The epic says he exhibited his vishwaroopam (the magnificent self) before exiting the court. These stories are played and replayed in classical culture across the east and south of India.

In fact, despite demolishing the Kashi Vishwanath temple in Varanasi and the Krishna temple in Mathura, Aurangzeb could not do much to the native Indian culture. For instance, it was just the other day I was searching on YouTube the famous "yahi madhava yahi keshava" song from Jayadeva's Gita Govindam when the search threw up many versions: As accompaniment for Kelucharan Mohapatra's Odissi performance and a bharatanatyam recital, then as vocal rendition by Kishori Amonkar and then again in the sopana sangeetham tradition of Kerala, and even as film lyrics, the same Sanskrit song creates multiple worlds of musical brilliance.

If Jayadeva, who lived in the 12th century in a village between Bhubaneswar and Puri, is celebrated every day in another remote corner of the country - once ravaged by Hyder Ali, Tipu Sultan, the Dutch, the Portuguese, the French and the British - Jayadeva's Krishna does not really need another temple. For all its faults, it is piety that preserved the Indian classical culture, not power politics. It is this piety that bound India together as it expressed itself in Gandhian nationalism.

Now, when the same traditions and symbols of piety and penance are used to seek political power, it evokes fear in the minds of those rendered as the Other: A madrasa was demolished in Haldwani, Uttarakhand, two days ago, leading to a riot that claimed six lives on Thursday.

Earlier this week, a 600-year-old mosque was demolished at Mehrauli in Delhi. Some of these structures might have had encroachments, but then the due process of law would have made the local residents feel secure instead of turning them violently aggrieved.

The Mehrauli and Haldwani incidents do not endorse Yogi's statement asking for just three temples the way Krishna asked for five villages. Even the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML), the post-Independence remnant of Jinnah's Muslim League and the biggest party of the Muslims, had officially welcomed the consecration of the Ram temple at Ayodhya built after the demolition of the Babri Masjid. Two days after the event, the Kerala unit president of the IUML, Sayyid Sadiq Ali Shihab Thangal, termed the Ram Temple a reality and said: "We cannot go back from that. There is no need to protest against it. The temple came up based on a court order and the Babri Masjid is about to be constructed. These two are now part of India. The Ram Temple and the proposed Babri Masjid are two best examples that strengthen secularism in our country."

There cannot be a more categorical acceptance of the 'reality' than this. Still, when Yogi asks for two more temples, how should the Muslim community respond? I know of three non-Hindu students of Delhi University who use Hindu names on their cab-hailing and food-delivery mobile apps because they are scared of a possible hate crime. Nothing has happened to them yet, but when the fringe elements are on the loose, trying to establish the primacy of their partisan banner over the national flag or when they do not lower their saffron banners even on Republic Day for the Tricolor to be unfurled in all its glory or when a saffron flag flies over the

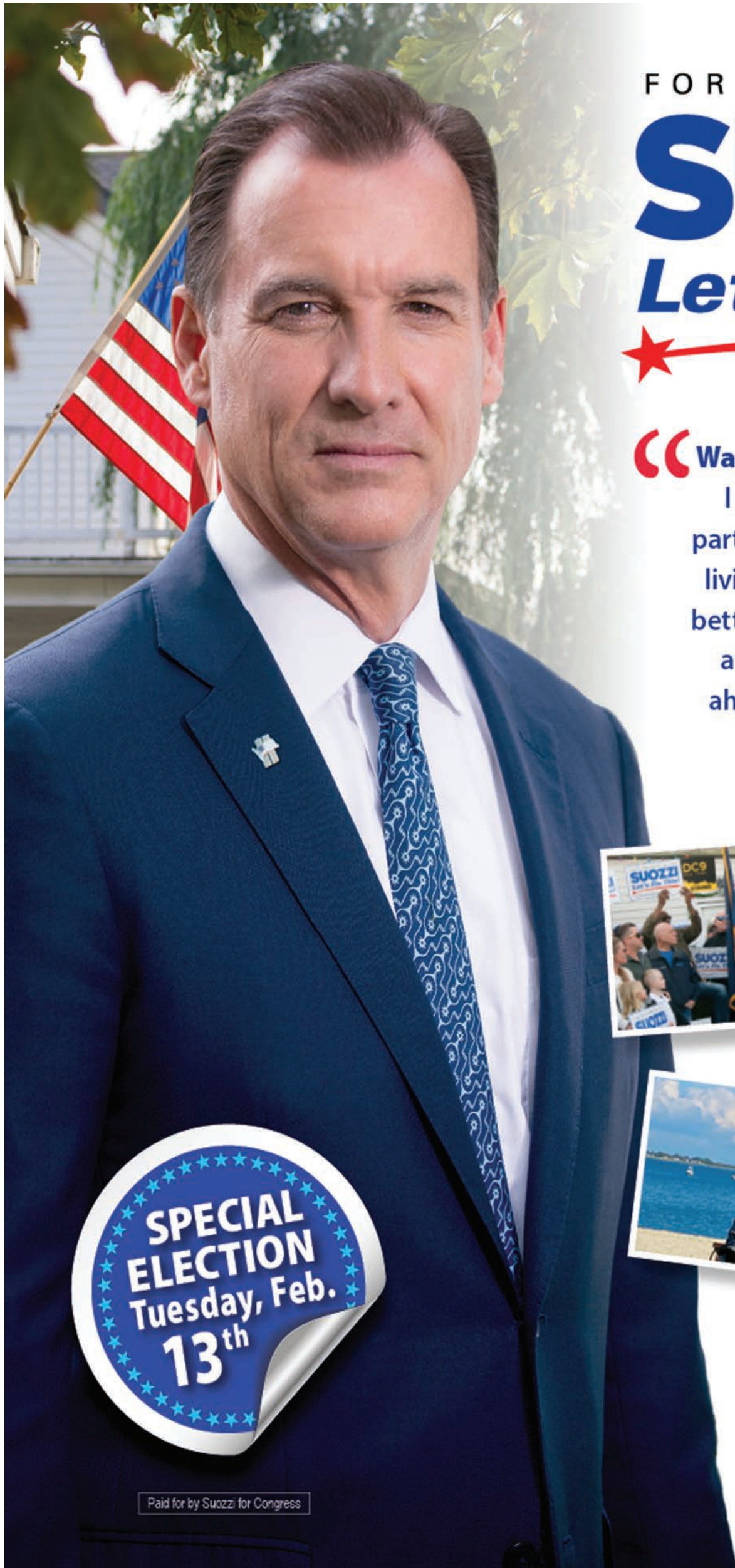
national flag in a group housing society of civil servants, fear envelops everyone who thinks and votes differently. Suddenly, Everyman becomes the Other and their common sentiment is fear - so fearful that nobody dare ask why the saffron flags cannot be removed long after the temple consecration.

Like Thangal, everybody, every Muslim, wants to move on. But they cannot when they are asked to pay something akin to jaziya for Aurangzeb's atrocities. When two more mosques are being demanded, what is the guarantee that 20 more will not be demolished? All those who were present at the consecration of the Ram temple - the Prime Minister, the RSS chief, the UP Governor and Chief Minister - can again sit together and offer a solemn, sacred guarantee to the Muslim community that but for Kashi and Mathura, no mosque will be surveyed or demanded. And drives against encroachments should no longer be 'special' or 'targeted'.

India is an overly religious country. Encroachments in the name of religion turn into extortionist enterprises and hence they ought to be cleared promptly, whenever and wherever they happen. At The Tribune Chowk, there is always a threat of a Shivling appearing miraculously. Whenever it does, we ring the alarm bells to get the encroachment cleared so that Lord Shiva is not demeaned by some roadside racketeer. Similarly, all illegal madrasas (actually, religious education should be actively discouraged) should be removed, but only after following the due process of law.

One of the greatest aphorisms from the Mahabharata is "yato dharmas tato jaya", uttered by a mother refusing to bless her son who wouldn't give his cousins what is rightfully theirs.

(The author is Editor-in-Chief of Tribune, India)



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## THE INDIAN CONSULATE IS AN EXTENSION OF THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA, AND OUR JOB IS TO SERVE OUR PEOPLE

Mr. Binaya Kumar Pradhan, Consul General of India at New York in his office.  
Photo / Jay Mandal- on assignment



Mr. Binaya Srikanta Pradhan took over as Consul General of India at New York on January 15, 2024. He is a career diplomat of the 2002 batch of the Indian Foreign Service. He speaks English, Russian, Hindi, and Odiya languages. His diplomatic career includes senior roles in Indian Embassies in Moscow, Turkmenistan, and Pakistan from 2004 to 2012. During 2012-14, he managed India's relations with Afghanistan and Iran at the Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi.

From 2014 to 2019, Mr. Pradhan served as the Chief of Staff to the Minister of Petroleum & Natural Gas, Government of India. His international engagements extended to being the Deputy Chief of Mission in the Embassy of India, Moscow, from June 2019 to July 2021.

Prior to his current role as Consul General of India, New York, he held the position of High Commissioner

of India to Tanzania and Permanent Representative to the East African Community (EAC) from August 2021 to January 2024. During this period India- Tanzania relationship was elevated to 'Strategic Partnership' and the first overseas campus of the prestigious Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Madras in Zanzibar, Tanzania was set up.

Mr. Pradhan demonstrates a keen interest in economic and energy diplomacy. Beyond his diplomatic pursuits, he finds enjoyment in playing golf. Mr. Pradhan is married to Ms. Monalisa and they are proud parents of two daughters, Dibyanshi and Diya.

Four days after joining the present position, on the 19th January, 2024, in an interview with the Editor of The Indian Panorama Prof. Indrajit S Saluja, Consul General Pradhan spelt out in brief his priorities which included nourishing and strengthening the already

strong bonds between India and the US, and exploring new areas of cooperation and relationship in diverse fields of economy, trade, technology, and culture etc. Mr. Pradhan added that serving the Indian Diaspora remained the primary focused concern of the Consulate. The strengthening of the multi-stake holders relationship will be another priority, he said.

Here is the second part of the long interview. The first one dealt with Mr. Pradhan's views on India's foreign policy, situations in India's neighborhood, and India's relations with the neighboring countries.

In the second part here, Mr. Pradhan speaks about the contribution of the Indian American Diaspora in strengthening India-US relations and in promoting business and cultural relations between the two countries, and about the consular services.

Here are the excerpts.

### TIP: WHAT DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE CONSULATE HERE?

**CG:** I would say I'm familiar with New York, I have come to this place, I guess, eight or nine times in past, always as part of a government delegation, for three days four days. So, while the city is not new for me, working here, as a diplomat, is a new experience. I'm really happy that the team here is quite strong. The team is quite experienced, and both, the Indian colleagues and the local colleagues form a robust team. I'm really happy that they're all committed. I found that each one of them is committed. They have understood the larger objective that we are here to serve. We are here to further the agenda of the government, which is to bring friendship between the two people and the two countries. Good thing is that in this team, everybody has understood that well,

I'm so happy to see that the number of complaints about our consular services has gone down drastically. I saw two people giving very positive comments about consular services on social media.



Mr. Binaya S Pradhan, Consul General of India at New York in conversation with Prof. Indrajit S Saluja, Editor of The Indian Panorama - Photo / Jay Mandal- on assignment

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**TIP : YOU HAVE A LOT OF EXPERIENCE ABOUT BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT, TRADE AND COMMERCE. BECAUSE IN TANZANIA, AS YOU JUST NOW SAID, THAT IT IS THE INDIANS, PARTICULARLY THE GUJARATIS, AND THEY IN FACT CONTROL THE ECONOMY OF THAT COUNTRY IF I'M NOT MISTAKEN. THEY PLAY A VERY IMPORTANT ROLE. AND IT'S THE SAME THING HERE. WE HAVE THE INDIAN DIASPORA HERE, CONTROLLING LEVERS OF LOCAL ECONOMY IN QUITE A FEW AREAS. AND THEN THERE IS A WIDER INTEREST OF PROMOTION OF TRADE AND COMMERCE BETWEEN INDIA AND THE US. IT HAS BEEN HAPPENING HERE, AND IT HAS ACCELERATED OVER THE YEARS. AND I'M SURE YOU ARE THE ONE WHO IS GOING TO PROBABLY LOOK INTO HOW TO FURTHER ACCELERATE IT. DO YOU HAVE ANY ROADMAP FOR THAT?**

CG: It would be not correct for me to say that I have a roadmap at this stage. Like I said, you know, it's very early, but I understand the task. If we have a target of \$500 billion of trade between India and United States, we need to do better. We need to bring the Indian business communities closer to the American business communities. We have to find the complementarities. We have to find the gaps where we can export more. We have to find gaps where we can connect the American business with Indian business in a win win situation. We have to get the developments reviewed at very high level. But having said that, I think, in order to make it a truly 21st century relationship we have to have stronger economic enhancement, stronger technology engagement between India and the United States. I understand the 10 states that I deal with in this region, are very prominent players in this respect. I look forward to working with the business communities here very closely. I want to work with the Indian business communities very closely who are stakeholders here. As you know, we have prominent Indian companies more than 150 who are present here. So, I want to identify areas where our intervention is required which can actually lead to some kind of enhancement of trade and investment engagement. But it's not one sided. When I talk about economic engagement I don't mean to indicate about Americans investing in India or I don't mean to Indians exporting to United States. I actually look for a Win-Win partnership, because if it is to sustain, if it is to be a long-term sustainable process, it has to be both ways.

**TIP: YOUR "ONE DISTRICT ONE PRODUCT" IS ALSO WORKING VERY WELL. I'M TOLD THAT PROBABLY IN THE COMING MONTH OR SO, YOU'RE GOING TO FOCUS ON JUTE PRODUCTS FROM INDIA.**

CG: Yes. When we bring a product, we have to sustain the focus on that. If we do it for a year and forget the next year it won't work. So, I feel that the focus that we put on coffee, we will continue that this year as well. We found there is good demand for those products which are ODOP products and we plan to continue the focus for five six years on each product so that people develop familiarity, and the market is created here. We will not be shifting every year or jumping from one to another. We will keep adding new products, though.

**TIP: WONDERFUL STRATEGY! I DON'T MEAN TO TIRE YOU SO MUCH. BUT THERE ARE A COUPLE OF QUESTIONS THAT I WOULD BE BOTHERING YOU WITH. ONE IS ABOUT OUR YOUNG PEOPLE, PARTICULARLY THE STUDENTS. LUCKILY, THIS JURISDICTION OF YOURS HAS PROBABLY THE BEST UNIVERSITIES KNOWN IN THE US. AND THERE IS A DIVERSE KIND OF EDUCATION AVAILABLE HERE. SOME SPECIALIZE IN TECHNOLOGY, SOME SPECIALIZE IN MEDICINE AND SOME SPECIALIZE IN FINANCE, SOME IN LAW, AND OBVIOUSLY, BECAUSE OF SO MANY GOOD UNIVERSITIES HERE, WE HAVE A NUMBER OF STUDENTS PREFERRING TO COME TO THIS AREA, AND WE HAVE A LARGE POPULATION OF INDIAN STUDENTS HERE. DO YOU HAVE ANY PLANS OF PROVIDING THEM BETTER FACILITIES OR INTEGRATING THEM IN SUCH A WAY THAT THEY BECOME A POWERFUL INSTRUMENT OF CHANGE HERE, AND IF THEY GO BACK TO INDIA, IN INDIA,**

CG: I'm happy that you asked me this question. In fact, today morning, we were discussing this issue. We were dealing with two Indian students who

passed away in Connecticut. I was basically part of the kind of process to send their mortal remains back to India. But that was a kind of occasion when we were discussing about the student community from India. As you rightly said, we have very well-known universities and the number of students in each of the 10 states would be quite high. It's more than 100,000 students. And they remain a very powerful constituency for us. I feel they have to be better connected with us. We have good association with different student bodies in different universities. But these days, thanks to social media, thanks to other innovative means, thanks to the possibility of using friendly associations to connect with them, the scope of connecting with Indian students is much better. We plan to work on that, in order to support the newcomers, at least. When somebody comes to United States, he's coming to a different culture, he's coming to a different place. After a year, he doesn't require anybody's support; he will be able to navigate his way through. But I think in the initial months one requires a certain amount of



The Indian Consulate in New York - India away from India; home away from home

handholding. I was so happy to see that many students, former students, many young people, many associations are working in districts and many people are creating videos, which are very popular on social media about how a newcomer should navigate his way through in a university campus or how you adjust to the climate here, how you adapt to the lifestyle here. But we also want to be part of this fraternity to work with Indian students. We want to be connected with them, the student bodies. They come with a lot of new ideas. We want to make them a part of the team in a way that they feel a part of the team India here. In a sense, they also, at the end of the day, knowingly, or unknowingly, they are doing the same job that we are doing. If we are here with the larger objective of bringing the two countries together, deepening the relationship, they are doing on the ground in a different way. They are connected to us in a more impactful manner. So, I plan to visit different universities here. I plan to meet the student bodies. I have asked my team that we should be connected to them through social media, the student

leaders, the student influencers, people who are doing good work in the youth space, we should be connected to them. I know that there are many Indian organizations who are working in that area. We will also try to take them along with us. This will remain a priority for me to remain connected to the youth, with the youth, the students.

**TIP: I THINK GOPIO IS ONE SUCH ORGANIZATION. THEY HAVE ALWAYS BEEN FACILITATING A RECEPTION FOR NEWCOMERS AMONG THE STUDENTS. I HAVE A SUGGESTION HERE WHICH YOU COULD GIVE A THOUGHT TO. LIKE WE HAVE PRAVASI BHARTIYA DIVAS IN INDIA, YOU MAY THINK OF A KIND OF INDIAN STUDENTS YOUTH FESTIVAL OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT, ONCE A YEAR OR IF YOU WANT TO HAVE IT AT TWO OR THREE DIFFERENT LOCATIONS, THEN MAYBE YOU CAN INCREASE THE FREQUENCY. THIS IS ONE WAY TO INTEGRATE THEM AS INDIANS. NUMBER TWO, IT WILL PROMOTE INDIAN CULTURAL VALUES. AND THEY CAN, OF COURSE, BE INVITING MAINSTREAM AMERICANS THAT WILL PROVIDE GREATER UNDERSTANDING AMONG THE AMERICAN YOUTH ABOUT INDIAN CULTURE.**

CG: That's a good suggestion. And when I said that, you just came to my mind. This could work. It's a good idea. And when I say engagement with youth, I mean, engagement with youth, not only of Indian youth, but also you know, the American heroes. And what you said makes sense, you know At the end of the day, if you are thinking of forging a partnership which would be a defining partnership of 21st century, you cannot do that without the youth, absolutely. They're an important part.

**TIP: I'M GLAD YOU UNDERSTAND THAT IMPORTANCE. AND COMING TO OUR WOMEN HERE. THEY HAVE A LOT MANY PROBLEMS, LIKE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, AND THERE ARE WOMEN WHO ARE BATTERED; THEY ARE SUBJECTED TO ALL KINDS OF BLACKMAIL, ETC. AND OVER THE YEARS, OF COURSE, CONSULATE HAS DONE A LOT TO TAKE CARE OF THEM. BUT STILL A LOT NEEDS TO BE DONE. AND MAYBE YOU COULD THINK OF WAYS AND MEANS TO FURTHER HELP THEM. MANY DO NOT KNOW THAT CONSULATE CAN HELP THEM. I DON'T KNOW HOW YOU WOULD LIKE TO LET EVERYBODY KNOW THAT THE CONSULATE IS THERE TO HELP THEM OUT. THAT IS ONE AREA WHERE PROBABLY MUCH MORE NEEDS TO BE DONE THAN HAS HITHERTO BEEN DONE.**

CG: When it comes to consular services, we are a service providing organization, you know. I would say that we also have gone through different processes. But I would say the issue of Indian nationals having difficulties here, whether it is women or whether it is asylum seekers, whether it is any kind of person, end of the day, we are here as an extension of government of India. Our primary job is to serve our own people. That remains our priority. What I have understood from my colleagues is that we are now having consular camps in different parts of the states. We are reaching out to different communities, doing our consular camps in gurdwaras doing our consular camps in other places. I think we can think of also reaching out to those places where we are yet to reach so that people don't have to come to Manhattan. Rather we go there, attend to them in their own places. If we still come across complaints, our objective would be to still work towards reaching that zero-complaint stage.

**TIP: WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SAY TO THE READERS OF THE INDIAN PANORAMA?**

CG: It is wonderful to be in New York. I have come here with a lot of excitement, enthusiasm and a commitment that I'll be part of the team, working with you very closely to bring our two countries together to bring the two people together; bringing the Indian consulate closer to the Indian community. Be always there with you and also working very closely with you.

**TIP: THANK YOU SO MUCH, SIR, FOR HAVING SPOKEN WITH THE INDIAN PANORAMA. THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME.**

CG: Thank you for your time.

# Allegations of Indian involvement in assassination efforts in US and Canada is very concerning says State Dept nominee



"Yes, it is very concerning what happened on US soil and Canadian soil," Dafna Hochman Rand, nominee to be Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, told members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee during her confirmation hearing on Thursday, February 8.

**FEBRUARY 09, 2024**

**WASHINGTON, D.C. (TIP):** The allegations that India was involved in the assassination attempts in the US and Canada are very concerning, a senior academician nominated to a top human rights diplomatic position in the State Department has told lawmakers.

"Yes, it is very concerning what happened on US soil and Canadian soil," Dafna Hochman Rand, nominee to be Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, told members of the Senate Foreign

Relations Committee during her confirmation hearing on Thursday.

She was responding to a question from Senator Ben Cardin, Chairman of the powerful Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

"I want to raise India... We know about a plot to assassinate... on US soil and Canadian soil. I'd like to hear your commitment to how you would get engaged in those types of efforts to make sure that type of conduct does not take place," Cardin asked.

"First and foremost, it's clear that India is a critical ally, the oldest democracy there, the biggest democracy, but it is those shared values, the democratic values that we need that bind this alliance. And as if confirmed, as DRL's Assistant Secretary, I will be a voice in the administration, making sure that we're not abashed," Rand said in response to the question.

India has described as a "matter of concern" the US linking an Indian official to a man charged with conspiring to kill a Sikh separatist on American soil, and asserted that follow-up action will be taken based on findings of a panel investigating the allegations.

India has already constituted a probe team to investigate the allegations relating to the foiled plot to kill Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, a Sikh extremist who is an American and Canadian citizen.

Regarding Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's allegations that there

was a "potential" involvement of Indian agents in the killing of Khalistani separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar in a Vancouver suburb in June.

The Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson said the main issue with Ottawa has been that of activities of anti-India elements in that country.

"Insofar as Canada is concerned, they have consistently given space to anti-India extremists and violence. That is at the heart of the issue. Our diplomatic representatives have borne the brunt of this," he said.

On other issues, Rand said, "We are not afraid to talk about our concerns about human rights, democracy and of course these troubling trends towards what we're seeing...Again, I'm not in the administration, so I don't know all the details of what happened. And I understand the DOJ and FBI are working on it, but I think it's critical that even as we strengthen our relationship with India as part of our Indo-Pacific strategy, we make human rights and democracy the center of that relationship," Rand said.

"We talk truth in this relationship and we speak frankly about our concerns. So I'm not shy and I will be a voice at the State Department and in the administration making that clear," said Rand who on November 9 last was nominated by the president to this position.

Rand currently serves as a Distinguished Resident Fellow in

Strategic Affairs at Georgetown University's Institute for the Study of Diplomacy and as a Lecturer at Princeton's School of Public and International Affairs.

She has spent the past two decades in public service, including most recently as the Director of the Office of Foreign Assistance at the Department of State. Previously, she was the Vice President of Policy and Research at Mercy Corps, a non-governmental humanitarian organization serving communities in over 40 countries.

Earlier in her career, Rand served as a Deputy Assistant Secretary of State in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, as well as on the staff of the State Department's Office of Policy Planning and the National Security Council. She is the former Deputy Director of Studies at the Centre for a New American Security and a former professional staff member of the US Senate Select Committee on Intelligence.

She started her career in government as the foreign policy and defense Legislative Assistant to Senator Frank R. Lautenberg from New Jersey. Her research has focused on international security and governance in the Middle East and North Africa, including two books on the subject. A native of Massachusetts, she earned her undergraduate degree at Harvard University and her PhD in political science at Columbia University.

(Source: PTI)

## Indian American Bhavini Patel is running for US Congress

**FEBRUARY 8, 2024**

**WASHINGTON, D.C. (TIP):** From helping her single parent mother running a food truck "India on Wheels" in Pittsburgh to launching a tech startup after completing her education from the Oxford University, Indian American Bhavini Patel is now running for US House of Representatives.

Patel, 30, last year on October 2 announced her decision to run for the Congress from the 12th Congressional District of Pennsylvania, which is currently held by her Democratic Party colleague Summer Lee.

Notably, Congresswoman Lee is one of the few lawmakers who had boycotted the historic Joint Address to the US Congress by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in June last year.

Preparing for her first hurdle of the primary, scheduled for April 23, Patel has raised over USD 310,000, of which she says roughly 70 per cent has been raised from within the State.

"It's truly emblematic of the community and the needs of the community. We've earned several labor

union endorsements including support from the steamfitters, the operating engineers, and SMART, which is a railroad transportation union. When we think about support from the unions, that's a really big deal, especially coming from Western Pennsylvania where there's such a strong history of the power of the labor movement," Patel told media.

In addition to that, she has also got endorsements from roughly 33 elected officials, including mayors of small towns as well as members of council in those areas.

Patel is a die-hard Biden supporter. "To be quite honest, I think he's one of our most progressive presidents that we've seen" she said, referring to some of the key bills that his administration has been able to deliver, including infrastructure bill, Inflation Reduction Act, and Chips and Sciences Act.

Originally from Gujarat in India, her mother came to this country as an immigrant.

"She came to this country with very little, which I think is a story that

resonates with many people in the Indian diaspora here in this country. When she came here, she raised my brother and me as a single parent. We moved around quite a bit, to various different cities, and she worked various odd jobs, washing dishes in the restaurant industry, working in the motel industry," Patel said.

"Then she eventually came to Monroeville, which is a small suburb in western Pennsylvania, and that's where she started a small catering business, supplying samosas and various other pastries to the local Patel brothers there. From there she started a food truck business. So, my family has been running food trucks for the last 25 years," she said.

"It's called India on Wheels. In many ways, that is my story. I grew up working in that family food truck business, grew up on Pitts campus, ran the serving window, helped out on the weekends with catering, and then at some point decided that I wanted to attend the University of Pittsburgh," she said.

Patel soon became the first in her



Bhavini Patel is running for US House of Representatives

family to graduate from college. "Then I earned a scholarship to get my master's at the University of Oxford. Since then, I have been involved in various different public service efforts. When I think about the Indian diaspora, I think about the power of that story. To me, that's so much, it's very much so emblematic of the American dream.

It's the power of an idea, being able to come from a small village growing up in poverty, but being able to raise a daughter, educate your children, and then raise a daughter that's running for US Congress.

Read full story at [www.theindianpanorama.news](http://www.theindianpanorama.news)

# NSF Director Panchanathan, several other Indian-Americans elected to National Academy of Engineering

"World-class science requires talented scientists and engineers drawn from every corner of our nation – from remote rural areas to the largest urban centers. The best science is shaped by a wide range of perspectives."

”



SETHURAMAN  
PANCHANATHAN  
NSF Director



NSF Director Panchanathan

FEBRUARY 10, 2024

WASHINGTON, D.C. (TIP): National Science Foundation Director Sethuraman Panchanathan and several other eminent Indian-American scientists have been elected to the prestigious National Academy of Engineering, according to an official release.

They include Ravi Prasher from Bloom Energy and Tejal Desai from Brown University. Thalappil Pradeep from IIT Chennai is the only Indian scientist among the 21 new international members selected to this top American engineering body.

This is in addition to the 114 new US

scientists who have been elected this year. This brings the total US membership to 2,310 and the number of international members to 332, the release said.

Election to the National Academy of Engineering is among the highest professional distinctions accorded to an engineer.

Panchanathan has been elected to NAE for multimedia computing for assistive and rehabilitative applications and for leadership at the institutional and national levels.

Among other Indian-American scientists elected to the body are Shailendra Bordawekar, vice president,

Small Molecule Chemistry, Manufacturing and Controls Development, AbbVie Inc., Gurnee, Ill; Surajit Chaudhuri, distinguished scientist, data systems, Microsoft Research; and Tejal Desai from School of Engineering, Brown University.

Garg Maheshwari, vice president, Biologics Development, Bristol Myers Squibb; Pandurang Nayak, vice president of Search, Google; Ravi Prasher, chief technology officer, Bloom Energy, and Raj Singh, regents professor of materials science and engineering, Oklahoma State University are also in the list.

The National Academy of Engineering said Thalappil Pradeep, Deepak Parekh Institute Chair Professor and professor of chemistry, Indian Institute of Technology Madras, Chennai, has been elected as the international member for contributions to cluster chemistry and the discovery and implementation of affordable drinking water solutions.

Election of the new NAE members is the culmination of a yearlong process. The ballot is set in December and the final vote for membership occurs during January. Individuals in the newly elected class will be formally inducted during the NAE's annual meeting on September 29, 2024.

(Source: PTI)

## Indo-Pacific Strategy has made US and region more secure, more prosperous: White House



Addressing the media on the second anniversary of the launch of the landmark foreign policy strategy of the Biden administration, Adrienne Watson, a spokesperson for the National Security Council of the White House, said "the United States has never been in a stronger position in the Indo-Pacific".

FEBRUARY 10, 2024

WASHINGTON, D.C. (TIP): The US has said the execution of its Indo-Pacific Strategy in 2022 amidst the strategic competition with China has made the country and the dynamic region more secure and more prosperous, and expanded the bilateral partnership with India in unprecedented ways.

Addressing the media on the second anniversary of the launch of the landmark foreign policy strategy of the Biden administration, Adrienne Watson, a spokesperson for the National Security Council of the White House, said "the United States has never been in a stronger position in the Indo-Pacific". "Over the past two years, we have made historic progress in advancing an Indo-Pacific that is free and open, connected, prosperous, secure, and resilient. Thanks to President Biden's leadership, the United States has never been in a stronger position in the Indo-Pacific," she said.

In the two years since the launch of the Indo-Pacific Strategy, the US has reinvested and revitalized its alliances and partnerships and taken them to new heights, Watson said.

"We have deepened and elevated alliances with Japan, the Republic of Korea (ROK), Australia, the Philippines, and Thailand. We upgraded our bilateral relationships with Vietnam and Indonesia, and our partnership with ASEAN.

"We have expanded our partnership with India in unprecedented ways. We have surged our efforts in the Pacific, including with two historic summits for Pacific Island leaders at the White House and the establishment of the Partners of the Blue Pacific," she said. The United States is an Indo-Pacific nation. As the most dynamic and fastest-growing region on earth, the Indo-Pacific is an essential driver of America's future security and prosperity, the state department said in a fact sheet.

The region is home to more than half the world's population, and it accounts for 60 per cent of global GDP as well as two-thirds of global economic growth.

Read full story at  
www.theindianpanorama.news

## 'Overseas Friends of BJP' in US to make 25 lakh calls to India during elections; send 3,000 Indian-Americans to campaign



The 'Overseas Friends of BJP' in the US has made an elaborate plan to make more than 2,50,000 calls to people across India urging them to vote and re-elect Prime Minister Narendra Modi for a third term

campaign for the party and its candidates in various capacities across India. The BJP has also created more than two dozen teams across the US to make specific calls and help in developing strategies according to different states and languages. "We started preparations from December itself and we are picking up speed this month. In February, we are starting a kickoff event all over the United States -- probably around 20-22 cities cutting across 18 States. We are trying to gather not only the sympathizers and volunteers of 'Overseas Friends of BJP', but also the general community, the community leaders, and the community who want to see Modi 3.0. So they will be participating in that," OFBJP USA President Adapa Prasad told PTI in a recent interview.

Read full story at www.theindianpanorama.news

FEBRUARY 08, 2024

WASHINGTON, D.C. (TIP): The 'Overseas Friends of BJP' in the US has made an elaborate plan to make more than 2,50,000 calls to people across India urging them to vote and re-elect Prime Minister Narendra Modi for a third term with a record 400 plus seats in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, according to community leaders.

'Overseas Friends of BJP' in the USA has also made plans to send a strong delegation of more than 3,000 Indian Americans who will

## Indian American Purdue University student Sameer Kamath died by suicide

FEBRUARY 8, 2024

WILLIAMSPORT, INDIANA (TIP): A 23-year-old Indian American student at Purdue University, who was found dead in a nature preserve in Indiana this week, died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head, according to authorities.

Sameer Kamath, a US citizen, was found dead in the woods on February 5 at approximately 5 pm in NICHES Land Trust - Crow's Grove in Williamsport, Indiana.

Justin Brummett, Coroner at Warren County Coroner's Office, said in a press release Wednesday that a forensic autopsy was performed on Kamath on February 6 in Crawfordsville, Indiana.

The press release from the coroner's office said that the preliminary cause of death is a "gunshot wound of the head" and Kamath died by "suicide". A toxicology report is pending.

"Through extensive investigation by the Warren County Coroner's Office in conjunction with multiple other local and federal agencies, we are now able to release a preliminary cause and manner of death," the release said.

The coroner's office said that prior to releasing this information, Kamath's family was notified of the results.

This is an ongoing investigation with the Warren County Coroner's Office, Warren County Sheriff's Office, Purdue University Administration and other supporting agencies, it said.

Read full story at www.theindianpanorama.news



Sameer Kamath was found dead in Crow's Grove in Williamsport, Indiana on February 5

## 'Won my heart': RLD chief hints at poll alliance with BJP

Rashtriya Lok Dal chief Jayant Chaudhary on Friday, Feb 9, signalled positive outcomes for the ongoing Lok Sabha pre-poll alliance talks with the ruling BJP saying the government had won his heart by honouring his grandfather and late Prime Minister Chaudhary Charan Singh with the Bharat Ratna.

"Dil jeet liya," Jayant, currently part of the anti-BJP INDIA bloc, said on X today after the news broke. Describing the feeling as one of absolute elation, Jayant said today was a big day. "It is an emotional moment for me, a memorable occasion. I thank President Droupadi Murmu, the Government of India and especially Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the decision to honour Chaudhary Charan Singh ji with the Bharat Ratna," Jayant said.

Asked if he would ally with the BJP, Jayant said, "Koi kasar rehti hai? (is anything left to be said?)". He, however, added that he was yet to announce any alliance. Importantly, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, chief architect of the INDIA bloc, also returned to the BJP-led NDA days after the announcement of the Bharat Ratna for late OBC icon from the state Karpooori Thakur.

Parallel to the BJP-RLD talks, YSRCP chief YS Jagan Mohan Reddy also met Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Parliament today just two days after TDP president N Chandrababu Naidu held parleys with BJP president JP Nadda and Union Home Minister Amit Shah. *Source: TNS*

# India has nearly 97 crore voters now, up 6% from 2019, says EC

NEW DELHI (TIP)

The Election Commission on Friday said nearly 97 crore Indians will be eligible to vote in this year's Lok Sabha elections. It also said over two crore young electors in age group of 18 to 29 years have been added in the voters' list. There has been a six per cent increase in registered voters from 2019, when the last Lok Sabha polls were held. The registered voters then were 91.20 crore. "The largest electorate in the world - 96.88 crore are registered to vote for the forthcoming General Elections in India," the EC said. The gender ratio has increased from 940 in 2023 to 948 in 2024, the poll panel said.

The Commission has put special emphasis on purity and health of the electoral roll along with disclosures and transparency in the revision of electoral rolls, an official pointed out. Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar had explained at a press conference in Pune the various tasks involved in revision of electoral rolls along with participation of political parties at every stage. Over 2.63 crore new electors have been included in the electoral roll, out of which around 1.41 crore are women who surpassed the newly-enrolled male voters (1.22 crore) by over 15 per cent, the poll authority said.

The EC also underlined that effort were made to support persons with disabilities (PwD) by flagging around 88.35 lakh such voters in the electoral roll database. This, it said, will ensure accessibility and inclusivity on polling day. In 2019, voters who had identified them as persons with disability stood at 45.64 lakh. After a thorough house-to-house verification, names of over 1.65 crore deceased, permanently shifted, and duplicate electors were deleted from the electoral rolls. "This comprehensive cleanup ensures the integrity and purity of the electoral process. It includes 67.82 lakh



dead voters, 75.11 lakh permanently shifted or absent voters and 22.05 lakh duplicate voters," it said. According to data shared by the EC, the number of third gender voters increased from 39.68 thousand in 2014 to a little over 48,000. At the same time, more than two crore young electors, spanning the 18-19 and 20-29 year age groups, have been added to the electoral roll. Over 10.64 lakh advance applications were received from those above 17 years of age for enrolment in the voters list. People who are not yet 18 will automatically get their voter identity cards once they attain the age of voting if they apply in advance. While 1.85 crore voters have been identified as above 80 years of age, the total number of 'centenarian' (those who are 100 years and above) stood at 2.38 lakh. EC considers those who are 80 years and above as senior citizens.

## Madrasa demolition sparks violence in Uttarakhand's Haldwani, 6 dead

HALDWANI/NEW DELHI (TIP)

Six "rioters" were killed in violence that broke out over the demolition of an illegally built madrasa, officials said as curfew remained enforced in Uttarakhand's Haldwani town.

More than 60 persons were hurt on Thursday, Feb 8, as local residents hurled stones and petrol bombs at municipal workers and the police, forcing many police personnel to seek refuge in a police station which the mob then set on fire.

Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhama visited Haldwani, meeting some of the injured. He termed the violence a "planned attack", and said the stockpiling of arms, stones and petrol bombs suggested this.

"Women police personnel were brutally thrashed. They even tried to throw a journalist into the flames... Every rioter involved in arson and stone pelting would be identified and strictest action taken against them," Dhama.

Altogether, six "rioters" were killed, SP (City) Harbans Singh said. Three others were said to be in a critical condition.

A day after the clashes, with curfew in force since 9 pm on Thursday, Haldwani's Banbhoolpura area looked deserted. Stones were strewn on the streets and there were charred remains of torched vehicles.

On Friday, 9, a further incident of violence was reported from the locality where the madrasa — which included a "structure" where prayers were held.

Over 1,000 police personnel remained deployed in the town, close to Nainital, officials said. The demolished structures were on government land, and municipal workers and police acted after court orders, they said.

The officials said stones were thrown at them from rooftops, where they appeared to have been stocked. Some of the alleged rioters killed in the violence had gunshot wounds.

Curfew has been lifted from outer areas of violence-hit Haldwani in Uttarakhand, after tension prevailed in the town following the demolition of an "illegally built" madrasa and an adjoining mosque. However, curfew remains in force in Banbhoolpura area.



Protesters hurl stones at police personnel in Haldwani. Reuters



## Money laundering case against NCB ex-top cop for Rs 25-crore bribe demand from SRK's family

The Enforcement Directorate has registered a money laundering case against former Mumbai NCB zonal director Sameer Wankhede taking cognisance of a CBI FIR in an alleged Rs 25-crore bribe demand from superstar Shah Rukh Khan's family to spare his son in a drugs case, official sources said Saturday, Feb 10.

The central agency has booked the case under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), they said.

Some former Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) officials have also been summoned.

Wankhede, a 2008-batch Indian Revenue Service (IRS) officer of the Customs and Indirect Taxes cadre, has moved the Bombay High Court seeking protection from any coercive action by the anti-money laundering agency.

He was booked by the CBI in May last year on charges of seeking Rs 25-crore bribe for not framing Shah Rukh Khan's son Aryan Khan in the drugs-on-cruise case, officials had said.

Aryan Khan was arrested in the alleged drug bust case on the Cordelia cruise ship on October 2, 2021.

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) booked Wankhede and others for alleged criminal conspiracy (120-B IPC), and threat of extortion (388 IPC) besides provisions pertaining to bribery under the Prevention of Corruption Act on a complaint from the NCB.

A year later, the NCB filed a charge sheet in the drugs-on-cruise case against 14 accused but gave a clean chit to Aryan Khan.

The much-hyped case took a twist when an 'independent witness' had claimed in 2021 that Rs 25 crore was demanded by an NCB official and other persons, including a witness Gosavi, to let off Aryan Khan.

The NCB later conducted an internal vigilance probe against Wankhede and others and shared the contents with CBI leading to registration of a case against him.

Source: PTI

# RS passes Bill to curb exam malpractices, paper leaks

NEW DELHI (TIP)

The Rajya Sabha on Friday passed the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Bill, 2024. The law which aims to curb irregularities in public examinations was passed by the Lok Sabha on February 6.

Union Minister for Minister of State for Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions Jitendra Singh, replying to the debate on the Bill said the legislation will protect students who are the "architects of new India and who will also be determining the face of India in 2047."

Singh also said that the "first-of-its-kind in history" law will not penalise bonafide students.

The Bill penalises any person or persons resorting to unfair means with a minimum imprisonment of three years which may extend to five years and with fine up to Rs 10 lakh. The law also prescribes a higher sentence ranging from three to ten years if a company providing services for the exam is involved. For organised rackets involved in unfair means, the Bill prescribes a minimum sentence of five years which can extend up to ten years with a fine of up to Rs 1 crore. Unfair means under the proposed law is defined to include leakage of question paper or answer key, tampering with answer sheets including Optical Mark Recognition (OMR) response sheets, manipulation in seating arrangements, allocation of dates and shifts for the candidates among others.

Congress leader Digvijaya Singh who supported the Bill called for a review of online examinations. "Online examinations have become a platform for corruption. Companies that have been blacklisted in one place



conduct their business elsewhere. I would request the minister to stop conducting online examinations and instead have offline exams," he said.

The Statement of Objects and Reasons of the Bill states that malpractices in public examinations lead to delays and cancellation of examinations adversely impact the prospects of millions of youth. Since technical education is in the concurrent list, a central legislation on the subject would mean that states have to adopt the legislation.

### Parliament passes three bills on J&K

The Parliament cleared a bill to add four groups, including Paddari and Pahari in the list of Scheduled Tribes in Jammu and Kashmir. The house approved the Constitution (Jammu and Kashmir) Scheduled Tribes Order (Amendment) Bill, 2024, which adds two other communities — Gadda Brahmin and Koli — to the Scheduled Tribes list.

The Upper House also cleared The Jammu and Kashmir Local Bodies Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024 and the Constitution (Jammu and Kashmir)

Scheduled Castes Order (Amendment) Bill, 2024 by voice vote.

The Lok Sabha had cleared the bills earlier this week. The Jammu and Kashmir Local Bodies Laws (Amendment) Bill-2024 seeks to provide reservation to Other Backward Classes in panchayats and municipalities in Jammu and Kashmir and bring consistency in the local body laws of the Union territory with the provisions of the Constitution.

Currently, there is no provision for reservation of seats for OBCs in panchayats and municipalities in Jammu and Kashmir.

The Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order (Amendment) Bill, 2024, adds Valmiki community as a synonym of Chura, Balmiki, Bhangi, and Mehtar communities in the list of Scheduled Castes in Jammu and Kashmir. The bill seeks to amend the Constitution (Jammu and Kashmir) Scheduled Castes Order of 1956, which lists the castes deemed to be Scheduled Castes in Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh.

The three bills were taken simultaneously for discussion and passage in the Upper House.

## Decisions of Sonia-led panel ruined economy, says FM

NEW DELHI (TIP)

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, speaking in the Lok Sabha on Friday, Feb 9, attacked Congress leader Sonia Gandhi, calling the National Advisory Council (NAC) headed by her an "unconstitutional" body which took decisions that "ruined the economy" during the UPA regime.

She apportioned blame on Sonia and her MP son Rahul Gandhi for pressuring then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. Sitharaman was replying to a motion to discuss the "White paper on Indian economy and its impact on the lives of people" in the Lok Sabha. The House adopted the motion by a voice vote.

"Sonia was an extra-constitutional and unaccountable person who oversaw this mismanagement as we joined the fragile five economies," Sitharaman alleged, adding, "The governance was under pressure of this extra-constitutional authority. The NAC okayed 710 files. What authority did it have? It was worse than a kitchen cabinet. While Manmohan was abroad, an ordinance



was torn up (by Rahul) insulting their own PM."

"The UPA regime always put family first and left the country in dire straits. It took us 10 years of dedicated effort to get the economy back on rails. Nothing in this white paper is baseless," she added.

The minister accused the UPA of ignoring the national security while the environment ministry had

become a bottleneck. "There was a critical shortage of military equipment. India had a policy to not develop border areas. We brought down environmental approvals from 316 days to 70 days. You wanted the public distribution system scrapped. We restored it," the minister said.

From 2005-14, only 102 cases under the PMLA reached the level of prosecution. "We gave independence to the ED and asked them to stop money laundering. Following this, 1,200 cases reached the prosecution stage," she said.

Earlier, Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury called the white paper a "granary of concoctions and a mountain of lies".

He said in 1947, the per capita income was Rs 247 and in 2011, it rose to Rs 64,361. "Poverty reduced from 65 per cent in 1947 to 27 per cent in 2011-12. Life expectancy improved and literacy rates grew. It was the Congress which brought the green revolution, land reforms and created IITs and IIMs," he added.

Source: TNS

# India in history this Week

## FEBRUARY 9 TO FEBRUARY 15

### 09 FEBRUARY



1971 Apollo 14 mission returns to Earth from moon.  
1960 Maratha general Dattaji Shinde died.  
1951 In 1951, the task of making a list was started to conduct the first census in independent India.  
1931 For the first time in India in 1931, a stamp with a picture was issued in honor of a person.  
2009 The Supreme Court on 9 February 2009 gave notice to the UP government on illegal construction in and around the Taj.  
2010 The Indian government banned commercial cultivation of Bt brinjal on February 9, 2010, indefinitely.

### 10 FEBRUARY

1846 The battle of Sobraon started between the East India Company and the Sikhs.  
2013 36 people were killed and 39 others were injured in a stampede during the Kumbh Mela ceremony in Allahabad.



1847: Bengali poet writer Navinchandra Sen was born.  
1818 Third and final battle between the British and Marathas was fought at Rampur.  
2009 Famous classical singer Pandit Bhimsen Joshi was awarded the Bharat Ratna, the country's highest civilian honor.'



### 11 FEBRUARY

1901 Indian revolutionary Damodar Swaroop Seth was born.  
1856 The East India Company took over Awadh.  
1968 Jana Sangh founder, writer, journalist Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyay was killed in Mughalsarai.



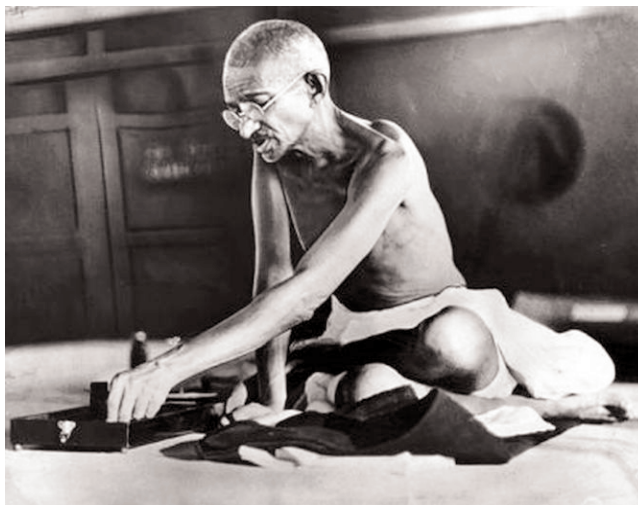
1933 The publication of Mahatma Gandhi's Harijan Weekly began in 1933.  
1966 Former Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri died in Tashkent in 1966.  
1997 Indian Astrophysicist Jayant V Narlikar awarded the 1996 Kalinga Prize in 1996 by UNESCO.

### 12 FEBRUARY

1502 Vasco-de-Gama sailed from Lisbon for a second trip to India.



1928 Gandhiji declared Satyagraha in Bardoli.



1975 India declared itself as a smallpox-free nation on 12 February 1975.

1999 President's rule in Bihar since 1999.  
2009 In 2009, the University of Cambridge announced the conferment of a DeLitt degree to India's renowned economist Amartya Sen.

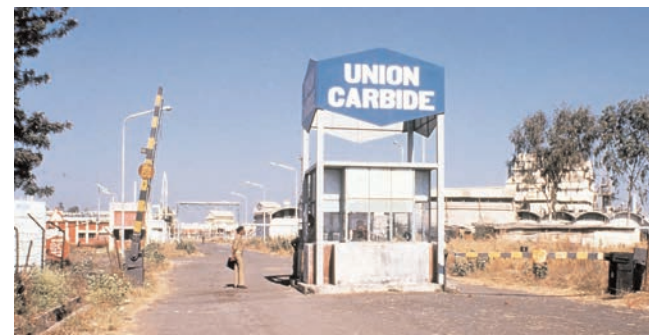
### 13 FEBRUARY

1879 Birth of freedom fighter Sarojini Naidu.



1959 Children's favorite Barbie doll begins selling.  
1984 Former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi inaugurates the Mazgaon Dock in Mumbai for the Navy.

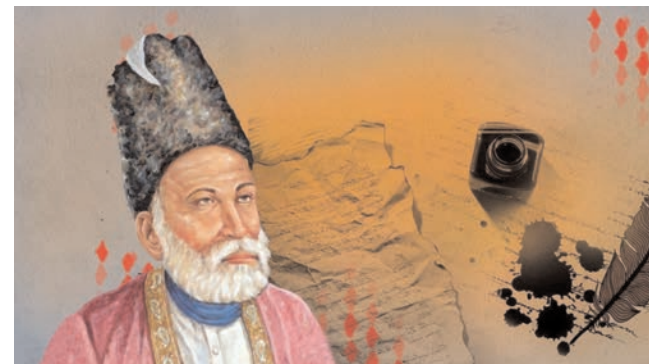
### 14 FEBRUARY



1989 Union Carbide, responsible for Bhopal gas scandal, agreed to give compensation to the government.

1881 In 1881, Rajendra Lal Dutt and Basu opened the country's first homoeopathic college in Calcutta.  
1967 In 1967, the 74th Lok Sabha elections were held.  
1999 The fifth National Games were inaugurated in Imphal in 1999.  
1970 The ordinance was passed by the President in 1970 about nationality.

### 15 FEBRUARY



1869 Mirza Ghalib, the famous Urdu poet, died.  
2017 On this day ISRO launched 104 satellites simultaneously.  
1903 On February 15, 1903, the world's favorite soft toy teddy bear was launched into the market by Morris Miktom.  
1967 Elections to the fourth Lok Sabha were held in 1967 in India.



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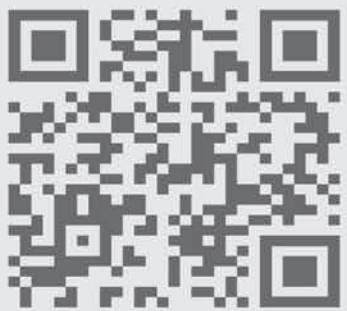
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# Indian companies invest US\$1200 million in Xela (Quetzaltenango)



Signing of last two letters of Intents towards installation of 70 MW Solar Power Project and Umbress Agreement to invest US\$1200 million at on January 29, 2024 Xela

**JANUARY 30, 2024**

**GUATEMALA CITY (TIP):** In recent years, India has actively expanded its reach into Latin America, notably in Guatemala, through collaborative initiatives that encompass investments, technology transfer, fostering people-to-people contacts, and skill development for infrastructure projects. This proactive engagement aligns with India's guiding philosophy of 'Vasudev Kutumbakam', reflecting the belief in the world as one family. It also underscores India's broader objectives of strengthening trade and investment ties in the Latin American region, with a particular emphasis on bolstering connections with the Central American Integration System (SICA) at a regional level. India's leadership role in the Global South is characterized by a consistent commitment to solidarity and cooperation with developing nations, addressing shared challenges, and fostering mutual development. This commitment led India to actively provide developmental assistance, financial aid, and technical expertise to countries in the Global South.

Given its status as the largest Central American country in both population and economy, Guatemala assumes crucial importance as a key partner for India in the Americas. Celebrating the 50th year of a robust bilateral relationship, India and Guatemala have undertaken numerous collaborative engagements. This strategic collaboration not only deepens bilateral ties but also contributes to the socio-economic development of both nations. While India extends its influence in the region by emphasizing people-to-people contact and skill development seeking to build sustainable partnerships for mutual benefit, Indian companies are committed to invest in the country, collaborating with Lakshmi Capital, an Indian company. This initiative not only reinforces the enduring partnership between India and Guatemala but also exemplifies India's dedication to fostering economic development and cooperation on the global stage.

In a significant initiative, the Government of India, in collaboration with the Municipality of Xela and Lakshmi Capital, has solidified its commitment by signing six Letters of Intent. These documents mark the commencement of several impactful infrastructural projects in Xela (Quetzaltenango), Guatemala. These projects are poised to have a direct and positive impact on the daily lives of local inhabitants, illustrating the strength and depth of the relationship between the two democracies. The signing of these Letters of Intent underscores the shared commitment to fostering socio-economic development and further strengthens the collaborative efforts between India and Guatemala in the realm of infrastructure and public welfare.

The first LoI was signed on 26 January 2024 during



Signing of first two Lols regarding Waste Management Plant and supply of 800 buses in the morning of January 26, 2024

Flag Hoisting Ceremony on Republic Day of India at Embassy of India for the introduction of 800 electronic buses in Xela marks a significant and forward-thinking initiative for the community. The introduction of electronic buses showcases a commitment to innovative and modern transportation solutions. It reflects a forward-looking approach to public transit that embraces technological advancements for the benefit of the community. The introduction of a large fleet of electronic buses can significantly enhance the public image of Xela. It will send a clear message that the municipality is committed to sustainable and responsible urban development, which can be positively received by residents and visitors alike.

Second Letter of Intent was also signed on 26 January 2024 morning at Embassy of India for the installation of a cable car in Xela. This cable car will significantly improve accessibility, offering an efficient and convenient transportation option, particularly beneficial for residents in hilly or challenging terrains. The introduction of this cable car is expected to enhance Xela's appeal, attracting tourists seeking unique and scenic transportation experiences. This, in turn, has the potential to positively impact the local economy by promoting tourism-related activities. The cable car journey will enhance the viewing of breathtaking views of Xela and its surroundings, adding a delightful dimension to transportation in the city.

Third Letter of Intent was signed in the evening of 26 January at Embassy premises during Republic Day Reception for solid waste management plant in Xela. A waste management plant will ensure proper disposal and treatment of solid waste, preventing environmental pollution and degradation. It contributes to maintaining the ecological balance in and around Xela. Effective solid waste management will reduce the risk of health hazards associated with improper waste disposal. Proper waste management will improve the aesthetics of the community by reducing litter and maintaining cleanliness. This fosters community pride and positively influences the overall image of Xela.



Signing of third and fourth Lols on Cable Car System and Hydro Power Project during Republic Day Reception in the evening of January 26, 2024

Fourth LoI was also signed in the evening of 26 January at Embassy of India for a hydro turbine in Xela. The installation of a hydro turbine in Xela will offer a range of significant benefits for the community and the environment. A hydro turbine will harness the power of flowing water to generate electricity. This is a clean and renewable energy source that contributes to reducing reliance on fossil fuels, decreasing greenhouse gas emissions, and promoting sustainable energy practices. The implementation of a hydro turbine will create job opportunities during its construction, operation, and maintenance phases. Utilizing a hydro turbine for electricity generation will enhance energy independence for Xela. Hydroelectric power is considered a low-carbon energy source. By generating electricity without burning fossil fuels, the hydro turbine will help reduce the carbon footprint of Xela, contributing to global efforts to combat climate change.

The fifth and sixth Letters of Intent signed at Municipality of Xela on 29 January 2024 between the Municipality of Xela, and Lakshmi Capital pertains to a significant 75-megawatt (MW) solar power project in Xela (Quetzaltenango), Guatemala. This initiative reflects a forward-looking approach to sustainable and clean energy solutions, emphasizing the importance of renewable energy in modern infrastructure development. The 75MW solar power project is expected to contribute substantially to the local energy landscape, providing a reliable and environmentally friendly source of electricity for the residents of Xela. Beyond the immediate benefits of increased energy access, the 75MW solar power project underscores the commitment of the involved parties to fostering economic development, promoting environmental sustainability, and enhancing the overall quality of life for the local population in Xela. The last Letter of Intent was an umbrella MoU which will cover the entire investment of US\$1200 million in the region by Lakshmi Capital.

The comprehensive set of proposals designed for the development of Xela reflects the strong and friendly ties between the two countries. Ambassador of India to Guatemala, Dr. Manoj Kumar Mohapatra, expressed his heartfelt appreciation for the amicable relationship and cordial cooperation between India and Guatemala. He specifically commended the Indian company Lakshmi Capital for its unwavering commitment to invest approximately \$6 billion in Guatemala, highlighting the commendable dedication of the company to contribute to the economic development of the region. Dr. Mohapatra also extended congratulations to the Mayor of Xela, Mr. Juan Fernando Lopez, for his leadership and for attracting significant investment to Xela. This acknowledgment underscores the collaborative efforts between the governments, businesses, and local authorities in fostering development initiatives that positively impact the lives of the people in Xela.

Through the platform, Ambassador Dr. Manoj Kumar Mohapatra reassured the Government of the Republic of Guatemala of the enduring diplomatic and economic goodwill between the two nations. He emphasized the shared commitment to advancing socio-economic growth and infrastructure development, underscoring the collaborative efforts aimed at fostering a stronger and more prosperous future for both India and Guatemala. This assurance reflects the commitment to maintaining and strengthening the bilateral relationship, fostering mutual understanding, and contributing to the overall well-being of the people in both countries.

# Celebration of 75th Republic Day at Embassy of India, Guatemala City



Ambassador Dr. Manoj Kumar Mohapatra and Mayor of Xela, Mr. Juan Fernando Lopez, collaboratively hoisted the Tricolour during the Flag Hoisting Ceremony at the Chancery Premises on the morning of January 26, 2024

## JANUARY 29, 2024

**GUATEMALA CITY (TIP):** The Embassy of India in Guatemala marked the 75th Republic Day with the traditional Flag Hoisting Ceremony in the morning and organizing a grand National Day Reception in the evening.

The day commenced with a Flag Hoisting Ceremony at the Embassy premises in the morning, where Ambassador Dr. Manoj Kumar Mohapatra unfurled the

Indian Tricolour. Chief Guest Mayor of Xela H.E. Mr. Juan Fernando Lopez, alongside other local dignitaries, members of the Indian community, ITEC students, and friends of India in Guatemala attended the event. Following the Flag Hoisting, Ambassador Dr. Mohapatra shared excerpts from the speech of Hon'ble President of India Smt. Draupadi Murmu, conveying greetings to all present and highlighting the historical significance of the day and India's unwavering commitment to democratic values.

The event continued with captivating cultural performances by local Indian community members. Notably, two Letters of Intent were signed during the ceremony between the Municipality of Xela and Indian company Lakshmi Capital, outlining plans for the supply of 800 buses and the initiation of a 75 MW Solar power plant in Xela. Mayor of Xela, H.E. Juan Fernando Lopez, and Mr. Wendal Rodas, CMD of Lakshmi Capital, signed the LoIs, marking significant strides toward the infrastructural betterment of Xela. Further, Embassy also organized donation of 10 computers by another Indian company in Guatemala, 24X7 to the school Mixta el Tablon in Sololá to enhance the educational betterment. The event concluded with a vibrant Garba Dance Celebration to mark the inscription of this popular Gujarati Dance on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity of UNESCO. Indian snacks were served to the attendees in the end.

In the evening, the Embassy hosted a National Day Reception to further celebrate the momentous occasion. The event began with the lighting of lamp by prominent dignitaries. The event brought together a diverse gathering, including newly designated Ministers and Vice Ministers of the new Government, newly elected Congressmen, Mayors, members of diplomatic corps, prominent local dignitaries, government officials, and members of the business and cultural communities.

The National Day Reception showcased cultural performances, highlighting India's rich heritage through vibrant Bollywood dance and music. The

venue's colorful display of the Indian flag added to the festive ambiance, symbolizing the enduring cultural bonds between India and Guatemala. Ambassador Dr. Manoj Kumar Mohapatra delivered his remarks, recounting India's democratic journey and emphasizing the strengthened bilateral relations with Guatemala. He announced a substantial investment by Indian companies in the Central American region, with a significant portion earmarked for Guatemala. The Ambassador disclosed plans for a proposed Metro line project and the supply of 5000 buses in El Salvador, along with a substantial investment of US\$1200 million in Xela, Guatemala. Two Letters of Intent were signed earlier in the day, with two more signed during the National Day Reception by the Mayor of Xela and CMD of Lakshmi Capital. The remaining two LoIs are scheduled for signing in Xela on January 29, 2024.

At the end, Indian cuisines, specially curated for the event, was served to the guests. The reception provided a platform for fostering diplomatic ties, cultural exchanges, and discussions on potential areas of collaboration for the future. The Embassy of India in Guatemala extended its gratitude to all attendees for making the Republic Day celebrations a memorable and joyous occasion.



Ambassador Dr. Manoj Kumar Mohapatra and Mayor of Xela, Mr. Juan Fernando Lopez celebrated India's Republic Day at Municipality of Xela to mark the strong relationship between the two countries.



Ambassador Dr. Manoj Kumar Mohapatra delivered his remarks at the Republic Day Reception, recounting India's democratic journey and emphasizing the strengthened bilateral relations with Guatemala.

As is the tradition every year, the Republic Day celebrations extended beyond the Chancery building. The Embassy reached out to other venues and cities to commemorate the occasion with the local community. As part of these efforts, Brahm Kumaris in Guatemala, displaying their cultural and spiritual commitment, raised the Tricolour alongside Ambassador Dr. Mohapatra, celebrating the 75th Republic Day at their premises on January 28, 2024. Similarly, Ambassador Dr. Manoj Kumar Mohapatra and Mayor of Xela, Mr. Juan Fernando Lopez, marked the Republic Day at the Municipality premises, showcasing their strong relationship.

# Visit of 20-Member delegation by FIEO- ushering new avenues for Indian companies in Guatemala



Ambassador Dr Manoj Kumar Mohapatra and Executive Director, Mr. Cristian Mayorga of Chamber of Commerce of Guatemala with other officials at the Presse Conference

Sectoral Business to Business between India and Guatemala. This event seeks to foster business collaboration between Indian manufacturing companies and Guatemalan importers, offering a space to explore business opportunities.

or trading companies have already confirmed their participation, scheduling business appointments for the upcoming meetings.

The scheduled B2B Meeting will facilitate exploration of potential trade



Ambassador Dr Manoj Kumar Mohapatra and Executive Director, Mr. Cristian Mayorga of Chamber of Commerce of Guatemala addressed questions from journalists during the press conference.

**FEBRUARY 2, 2024**

**GUATEMALA CITY (TIP):** India-Guatemala trade relations have steadily grown, reflecting a mutual commitment to economic collaboration. To promote this bilateral trade further, a delegation of 20 Indian companies led by Federation of Indian Export Organization (FIEO) is visiting Guatemala to interact with Local Guatemalan Companies in various Business to Business Meeting from 13-14 February 2024.

FIEO is an apex body of the Government recognized Export Promotion Councils, Commodity Boards and Export Development Authorities in India. It was set up in 1965 by Ministry of Commerce, Govt. of India to focus the efforts of all stakeholders engaged in promotion of trade from the country. FIEO exchanges business delegations, establishes MoUs with counterpart organizations overseas, and arranges exhibitions, catalogue shows abroad. It provides the crucial interface between International Trading community of India with the Central and State Governments, Financial

Institutions, Ports, Railways, Surface Transport and all engaged in Export Trade Facilitation. It directly and indirectly serves the interests of over 200,000 exporters from every Industry and Services sector in India.

Guatemala emerged as India's biggest trading partner in the Central American Region in 2021- 22 with bilateral trade of US\$ 573.21 million which has now increased to US\$693 in 2022-23, solidifying a rising trend. Pharmaceuticals, textiles (especially cotton yarn and fibers), engineering products, automobiles- two and three wheelers, motor vehicles/cars, auto components and parts, iron and steel, industrial machinery and parts, electrical machinery and equipment are the top products exported to Guatemala while India mainly imports Wood, wood charcoal, Coffee, aluminum scrap from Guatemala.

The Federation of Indian Export Organizations (FIEO), in collaboration with the Embassy of India in Guatemala and the Chamber of Commerce of Guatemala, is pleased to announce a Multi-

The trade delegation from India is composed of 20 leading companies covering various sectors, such as- Security equipment, Construction and design, Vehicle spare parts, Grains and spices, Packaging and textiles, Kitchen and household items, Pharmaceuticals and Cleaning products. The collaboration between FIEO, the Embassy of India in Guatemala and the Chamber of Commerce has been fundamental for the organization of these Business-to-Business Meetings. Recognizing the significant potential of this event, the Chamber of Commerce has extended invitations to affiliated companies and the general public, resulting in substantial interest. Over 90 importing, distributing,

opportunities, allowing businesses from both countries to identify areas of mutual interest and collaboration. The delegation will gain insights of Guatemalan markets, helping them understand regulatory environments, consumer behavior; and market trends, which is crucial for successful market entry. These meetings can not only serve as a forum to promote investment opportunities, encouraging businesses to invest in each other's countries and contribute to economic growth but also provide a platform for networking, enabling companies to connect with potential partners, suppliers, and distributors, thereby expanding their business networks.

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# Valentine's Day: Annual festival to celebrate romance, love, friendship and admiration

Valentine's Day falls on February 14. This year, the day will be observed on Wednesday. On this day lovers express their affection with greetings and gifts. Given their similarities, it has been suggested that the holiday has origins in the Roman festival of Lupercalia, held in mid-February. The festival, which celebrated the coming of spring, included fertility rites and the pairing off of women with men by lottery. At the end of the 5th century, Pope Gelasius I forbid the celebration of Lupercalia and is sometimes attributed with replacing it with St. Valentine's Day, but the true origin of the holiday is vague at best. Valentine's Day did not come to be celebrated as a day of romance until about the 14th century.

Across the globe, candy, flowers and gifts are exchanged between loved ones, all in the name of St. Valentine.

But who is this mysterious saint and where did these traditions come from?

## The Legend of St. Valentine

Where did Valentine's Day originate from? The history of the holiday—and the story of its patron saint—is shrouded in mystery. We do know that February has long been celebrated as a month of romance, and that St. Valentine's Day, as we know it today, contains vestiges of both Christian and ancient Roman tradition. But who was Saint Valentine, and how did he become associated with this ancient rite?

The Catholic Church recognizes at least three different saints named Valentine or Valentinus, all of whom were martyred. One legend contends that Valentine was a priest who served during the third century in Rome. When Emperor Claudius II decided that single men made better soldiers than those with wives and families, he outlawed marriage for young men. Valentine, realizing the injustice of the decree, defied Claudius and continued to perform marriages for young lovers in secret. When Valentine's actions were discovered, Claudius ordered that he be put to death. Still others insist that it was Saint Valentine of Terni, a bishop, who was the true namesake of the holiday. He, too, was beheaded by Claudius II outside Rome.

Other stories suggest that Valentine may have been killed for attempting to help Christians escape harsh Roman prisons, where they were often beaten and tortured. According to one legend, an imprisoned Valentine actually sent the first "valentine" greeting himself after he fell in love with a young girl—possibly his jailor's daughter—who visited him during his confinement.

Before his death, it is alleged that he wrote her a letter signed "From your Valentine," an expression that is still in use today. Although

the truth behind the Valentine legends is murky, the stories all emphasize his appeal as a sympathetic, heroic and — m o s t i m p o r t a n t l y — romantic figure. By the Middle Ages, perhaps thanks to this reputation, Valentine



would become one of the most popular saints in England and France.

## Origins of Valentine's Day

While some believe that Valentine's Day is celebrated in the middle of February to commemorate the anniversary of Valentine's death or burial—which probably occurred around A.D. 270—others claim that the Christian church may have decided to place St. Valentine's feast day in the middle of February in an effort to "Christianize" the pagan celebration of Lupercalia. Celebrated at the ides of February, or February 15, Lupercalia was a fertility festival dedicated to Faunus, the Roman god of agriculture, as well as to the Roman founders Romulus and Remus.

To begin the festival, members of the Luperci, an order of Roman priests, would gather at a sacred cave where the infants Romulus and Remus, the founders of Rome, were believed to have been cared for by a she-wolf or lupa. The priests would sacrifice a goat, for fertility, and a dog, for purification. They would then strip the goat's hide into strips, dip them into the sacrificial blood and take to the streets, gently slapping both women and crop fields with the goat hide. Far from being fearful, Roman women welcomed the touch of the hides because it was believed to make them more fertile in the coming year. Later in the day, according to legend, all the young women in the city would place their names in a big urn. The city's bachelors would each choose a name and become paired for the year with his chosen woman. These matches often ended in marriage.

## A Day of Romance and Love

Lupercalia survived the initial rise of Christianity but was outlawed—as it was deemed "un-Christian"—at the end of the 5th century, when Pope Gelasius declared February 14 St. Valentine's Day. It was not until much later, however, that the day became definitively associated with love.

During the Middle Ages, it was commonly believed in

France and England that February 14 was the beginning of birds' mating season, which added to the idea that the middle of Valentine's Day should be a day for romance. The English poet Geoffrey Chaucer was the first to record St. Valentine's Day as a day of romantic celebration in his 1375 poem "Parliament of Fowles," writing, "For this was sent on Seynt Valentyne's day / Whan every foul cometh ther to choose his mate."

Valentine greetings were popular as far back as the Middle Ages, though written Valentine's didn't begin to appear until after 1400. The oldest known valentine still in existence today was a poem written in 1415 by Charles, Duke of Orleans, to his wife while he was imprisoned in the Tower of London following his capture at the Battle of Agincourt. (The greeting is now part of the manuscript collection of the British Library in London, England.) Several years later, it is believed that King Henry V hired a writer named John Lydgate to compose a valentine note to Catherine of Valois.

## Who Is Cupid?

Cupid is often portrayed on Valentine's Day cards as a naked cherub launching arrows of love at unsuspecting lovers. But the Roman God Cupid has his roots in Greek mythology as the Greek god of love, Eros. Accounts of his birth vary; some say he is the son of Nyx and Erebus; others, of Aphrodite and Ares; still others suggest he is the son of Iris and Zephyrus or even Aphrodite and Zeus (who would have been both his father and grandfather).

According to the Greek Archaic poets, Eros was a handsome





immortal played with the emotions of Gods and men, using golden arrows to incite love and leaden ones to sow aversion. It wasn't until the Hellenistic period that he began to be portrayed as the mischievous, chubby child he'd become on Valentine's Day cards.

### Greetings and Gifts

In addition to the United States, Valentine's Day is celebrated in Canada, Mexico, the United Kingdom, France and Australia. In Great Britain, Valentine's Day began to be popularly celebrated around the 17th century.

By the middle of the 18th, it was common for friends and lovers of all social classes to exchange small tokens of affection or handwritten notes, and by 1900 printed cards began to replace written letters due to improvements in printing technology. Ready-made cards were an easy way for people to express their emotions in a time when direct expression of one's feelings was discouraged. Cheaper postage rates also contributed to an increase in the popularity of sending Valentine's Day greetings.

Americans probably began exchanging hand-made valentines in the early 1700s. In the 1840s, Esther A. Howland began selling the first mass-produced valentines in America. Howland, known as the "Mother of the Valentine," made elaborate creations with real lace, ribbons and colorful pictures known as "scrap." Today, according to Hallmark, an estimated 145 million Valentine's Day cards are sent each year, making Valentine's Day the second largest card-sending holiday of the year.

### Valentine's Week

While Valentine's Day falls on February 14, the excitement for the month of love begins in the week before. There are seven days dedicated to celebration of love before Valentine's Day. It starts from February 7. These seven days of love are Rose Day (February 7), Propose Day (February 8), Chocolate Day (February 9), Teddy Day (February 10), Promise Day (February 11), Hug Day (February 12), and Kiss Day (February 13).

#### Rose Day

Rose Day falls on February 7 annually. It is the first day of the Valentine's Week. On this day, couples exchange roses or send a bouquet to their loved ones. People also gift someone they like or adore with flowers to mark this occasion. While people generally gift their partners roses on this day, it shouldn't stop you from surprising your love with a bouquet of their favourite flowers. Different colours of roses hold a special meaning on this day. For instance, red signifies love, yellow stands for friendship, pink signifies appreciation and admiration, and more.

#### Propose Day

Propose Day is the second day of Valentine's Week. It falls on February 8. As the name suggests, it is the day for people to confess their feelings or pop the big question to their love interest - you can ask a potential partner to be your partner or to marry you. However, you should confirm that your partner wants you to ask this question before jumping the gun and putting them



in an awkward position.

#### Chocolate Day

Chocolate Day is the third day and falls after Propose Day on February 9. On this day, people gift chocolates to their partner, crush or love interest. Some also prepare handmade chocolates or make an assortment of their partner's favourite candies as a gift. In case, your loved one doesn't like sweets, you can give them their favourite snack as a present.

#### Teddy Day

Teddy falls on February 10. It is the fourth day of the Valentine's Week. People in love surprise their partners on this day by gifting them with adorable plushies or teddy bears. It is believed that a cuddly toy would help your partner destress or forget their worries as the present will remind them of your love.

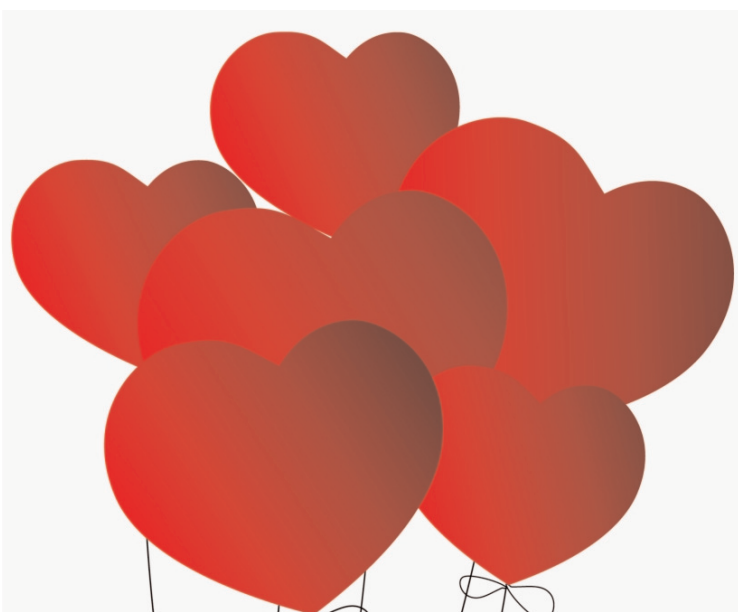
#### Promise Day

Promise Day falls on February 11. It is the fifth day of the Valentine's Week. On Promise Day, people make promises to love and cherish each other through thick and thin, strengthen their bond, be a cheerleader, and give support in difficult situations. This promise or commitment helps them show their partner the intensity of their love for them.

#### Hug Day

Hug Day is the sixth day of Valentine's Week and falls on February 12. A hug is a comforting gesture, and when one receives it from their loved ones, it helps remove all worries from their mind. After all, physical affection works wonders when language fails to express our true feelings. Therefore, on Hug Day, partners hug each other to comfort each other and promise to be the light in each other's darkest days.

Kiss Day is celebrated a day before Valentine's Day. It falls on February 13. People in love seal their relationship with a kiss on this day or show affection for their partner with this act of love.



# NJS PAYS RESPECT TO QUEEN OF SOUL

BY MABEL PAIS

"What the New Jersey Symphony has established, bringing music to the Garden State in schools and in six different cities, is a sincere accomplishment. And it's never been better." - nj.com

The New Jersey Symphony (NJS) presents a concert dedicated to the Queen of Soul, Aretha Franklin, featuring Capathia Jenkins and three-time GRAMMY® Award-nominee Ryan Shaw, with Lucas Waldin conducting.

Audiences will have four chances to hear the exciting performance of 'Respect: A Tribute to Aretha Franklin,' featuring hit songs like 'A Natural Woman,' 'Chain of Fools,' and the titular 'Respect' (see program below).

Franklin, known world-wide as the reigning Queen of Soul, is one of the best-selling musical artists of all time with global sales of more than 75 million records. She also won 18 GRAMMY® Awards out of her 44 nominations. In 1987, she was the first female musical artist inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

The show was partially developed by Capathia Jenkins, who is a singer and actor with credits on Broadway and television, as well as a highly regarded concert singer who has appeared with numerous orchestras across the US. She has said of the show, "I do not try to emulate her. But what I do is bring myself to all the material. I think one of the things Aretha did so brilliantly was that no matter what she was singing she was always able to bring her soul and her



Capathia Jenkins & Ryan Shaw



Credit / njsymphony.org

honesty and her gospel roots to everything." (Philadelphia Tribune)

Joining Jenkins on stage is Ryan Shaw, a singer, songwriter and recording artist whose credits include roles on stage in

London's West End and Broadway, along with his GRAMMY® nominations for his albums 'This is Ryan Shaw,' 'In Between' and Dynotone's 'Real Love.' His latest album, 'Imagining Marvin,' includes

original songs alongside hits from the legendary Marvin Gaye.

Conductor Lucas Waldin has conducted many orchestras across the US and his native Canada, including The Cleveland Orchestra, Houston Symphony, Dallas Symphony and Toronto Symphony, among others. He has also collaborated with artists including Carly Rae Jepsen, The Barenaked Ladies and Ben Folds.

## PROGRAM

### Respect: A Tribute to Aretha Franklin

New Jersey Symphony Special Concert - Symphony Celebration

Lucas Waldin conductor

Capathia Jenkins vocalist

Ryan Shaw vocalist

New Jersey Symphony

Morristown ? Thursday, February 15, 2024, 7:30 pm Mayo Performing Arts Center

Red Bank ? Friday, February 16, 2024, 8 pm Count Basie Center for the Arts

Newark ? Saturday, February 17, 2024, 8 pm New Jersey Performing Arts Center

New Brunswick ? Sunday, February 18, 2024, 3 pm State Theatre New Jersey

For more information on this and other concerts [njsymphony.org/events](http://njsymphony.org/events)

## TICKETS

To purchase tickets for the performance, visit [njsymphony.org/events](http://njsymphony.org/events) or call 1.800.ALLEGRO (255.3476).

# NJS PRESENTS VIVALDI'S AUDIENCE-FAVORITE WORKS

BY MABEL PAIS

## Featuring Indian-American Reena Esmail, Music Composer

The New Jersey Symphony (NJS) presents four performances of Antonio Vivaldi's 'The Four Seasons,' one of the composer's best-known and well-loved works and a perennial audience favorite. Concertmaster Eric Wyrick leads the orchestra as violin soloist in the famous nature-inspired composition.

Music Director Xian Zhang conducts Richard Strauss' Oboe Concerto, which features New Jersey Symphony Principal Oboe Robert Ingliss; and Reena Esmail's RE|Member, written to commemorate the return of orchestra members to stages all over the country after the COVID-19 pandemic.

New Jersey audiences will have four performances from which to choose in February (see program below).

## PROGRAM

### VIVALDI'S THE FOUR SEASONS

New Jersey Symphony Classical  
Xian Zhang conductor  
Robert Ingliss oboe  
Eric Wyrick violin - leads and solos

## NEW JERSEY SYMPHONY

Newark ? Thursday, February 22, 2024, 1:30 pm New Jersey Performing Arts Center

Newark ? Friday, February 23, 2024, 8 pm New Jersey Performing Arts Center

Red Bank ? Saturday, February 24, 2024, 8 pm Count Basie Center for the Arts



Reena Esmail

Credit / njsymphony.org

New Brunswick ? Sunday, February 25, 2024, 3 pm State Theatre New Jersey

Reena Esmail RE|Member

R. Strauss Oboe Concerto

### VIVALDI THE FOUR SEASONS

For more information on this and other concerts, visit [njsymphony.org/events](http://njsymphony.org/events) or email [information@njsymphony.org](mailto:information@njsymphony.org).

## TICKETS

For Tickets visit [njsymphony.org/events](http://njsymphony.org/events) or call 1.800.ALLEGRO (255.3476).

## THE NEW JERSEY SYMPHONY

The Emmy and Grammy Award-winning New Jersey

Symphony is redefining what it means to be a nationally leading, relevant orchestra in the 21st century. The Symphony is renewing its deeply rooted commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion by championing new, and often local, artists; engaging audiences for whom the inspiring depth and breadth of classical music will be a new experience; and incorporating the broadest possible representation in all aspects of the organization - all to better reflect and serve its vibrant communities.

Since 2021, Music Director Xian Zhang has worked together with composer, violinist, educator and social-justice advocate Daniel Bernard Roumain, the orchestra's Resident Artistic Catalyst, to offer programming that connects with diverse communities in Newark and throughout New Jersey.

Internationally renowned Chinese American conductor Xian Zhang began her tenure as the New Jersey Symphony's current Music Director in 2016. Since her arrival at the New Jersey Symphony, Zhang has revitalized programming with an industry-leading commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion in mainstage concerts.

## CONNECT WITH NJ SYMPHONY:

[njsymphony.org](http://njsymphony.org)

@NJSymphony on Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and X, formerly known as Twitter @NewJerseySymphony on YouTube

Email: [information@njsymphony.org](mailto:information@njsymphony.org)

(Mabel Pais writes on The Arts and Entertainment, Social Issues, Spirituality, Education, Cuisine, Health & Wellness, and Business)

# INDIA AND INDIAN DIASPORA WIN AT 2024 SUNDANCE FILM FEST

BY MABEL PAIS

At the 2024 Sundance Film Festival ([festival.sundance.org](https://festival.sundance.org)), India and the Indian diaspora were honored with awards in different categories.

On January 26, the jury and audience award-winning films for the 2024 Sundance Film Festival were announced during a ceremony at The Ray Theatre in Park City. The Awards Ceremony occurred two days before the conclusion of the Festival, taking place January 18-28, 2024, in person in Park City and Salt Lake City, Utah, with a selection of titles available online nationwide from January 25-28, 2024. This year marks the 40th edition of the Festival, bringing together audiences in Utah and beyond to celebrate Sundance's rich history of supporting engaging new stories and groundbreaking independent artists. Live updates were shared on the Sundance Film Festival's official social media accounts throughout the duration of the awards ceremony.

## JURORS

Mira Nair was among the jurors in World Cinema Dramatic Competition;

Shaunak Sen, among others, was a juror in the World Cinema Documentary Competition.

## AWARDEES

A World Cinema Documentary Special Jury Award for Craft was presented to 'Nocturnes' / India, U.S.A. / World Premiere

Director and Producer: Anirban Dutta; Director: Anupama Srinivasan

**In the dense forests of the Eastern Himalayas, moths are whispering something to us. In the dark of night, two curious observers shine a light on this secret universe.**

**JURY CITATION:** The images and sound in this film immediately invoke in the audience a meditative state as they enter the film's world, at the same time bringing a laser focus to the film's main subject. The confidence of the cinematography and sound design in building this

story is part of its power and allure. The World Cinema Documentary Special Jury Award for Craft goes to 'Nocturnes.'

**THE AUDIENCE AWARD:** World Cinema Dramatic was awarded to

'Girls Will Be Girls' / India, France, Norway / World Premiere

Director, Screenwriter, and Producer: Shuchi Talati; Producers: Richa Chadha, Claire Chassagne



'Girls Will Be Girls.'  
Credit / festival.sundance.org

**In a strict boarding school nestled in the Himalayas, 16-year-old Mira discovers desire and romance. But her sexual, rebellious awakening is disrupted by her mother who never got to come of age herself.**

Cast: Preeti Panigrahi, Kani Kusruti, Kesav Binoy Kiron.

A World Cinema Dramatic Special Jury Award for Acting was presented to Preeti Panigrahi for 'Girls Will Be Girls' / India, France, Norway / World Premiere

Director, Screenwriter, and Producer: Shuchi Talati; Producers: Richa Chadha, Claire Chassagne

**In a strict boarding school nestled in the Himalayas, 16-year-old Mira discovers desire and romance. But her sexual, rebellious awakening is disrupted by her mother who never got to come of age herself.**

Cast: Preeti Panigrahi, Kani Kusruti, Kesav Binoy Kiron.

**JURY CITATION:** This luminous performance completely moved and surprised us, bringing to life a

character with intelligence and vulnerability. In a film that dared to explore young female sexuality and agency with frankness and sweetness, this performance was delicate, uncompromising, and unforgettable. The winner of the World Cinema Dramatic Special Jury Award for Acting goes to Preeti Panigrahi in 'Girls Will Be Girls.'

The Sundance Institute | Adobe Mentorship Award for Nonfiction went to Kristina Motwani

The Sundance Institute | NHK Award (of the Japan Broadcasting Corporation) went to Saim Sadiq for 'We Are Never Going to Die.'

## THE SUNDANCE FILM FESTIVAL®

The Sundance Film Festival, a program of the nonprofit Sundance Institute, is the pre-eminent gathering of original storytellers and audiences seeking new voices and fresh perspectives. Since 1985, hundreds of films launched at the Festival have gone on to gain critical acclaim and reach new audiences worldwide.

For more information, visit [festival.sundance.org](https://festival.sundance.org) and follow the Festival on Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, X (formerly Twitter), and YouTube.

## THE SUNDANCE INSTITUTE

As a champion and curator of independent stories, the nonprofit Sundance Institute provides and preserves the space for artists across storytelling media to create and thrive. Founded in 1981 by Robert Redford, the Institute's signature labs, granting, and mentorship programs, dedicated to developing new work, take place throughout the year in the U.S. and internationally.

Sundance Collab ([collab.sundance.org](https://collab.sundance.org)), a digital community platform, brings a global cohort of working artists together to learn from Sundance advisors and connect with each other in a creative space, developing and sharing works in progress. Learn more at [sundance.org](https://sundance.org)

Connect with Sundance Institute ([sundance.org](https://sundance.org)) on Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, X (formerly Twitter), and YouTube.

# EXPERIENCE NUANCED DANCE MOVEMENTS WITH LIMON

MABEL PAIS

"Limon fostered diversity in the arts and shaped the history of dance in New York, and beyond today, his remarkable legacy lives on." - Eric Adams, Mayor of the City of New York.

Limón Dance Company makes its NJPAC debut on Saturday February 17, 2024 @ 7:30 p.m.

Founded in 1946 by José Limón and Doris Humphrey, the Limón Dance Company is acclaimed worldwide for its dramatic expression, technical mastery and expansive, yet nuanced movement. Led by Artistic Director Dante Puleio, the company will perform iconic Limón works in addition to 'Migrant Mother' by 2022 Bessie Award winner Raúl Tamez.

Limón has been at the vanguard of American Modern dance since its inception and is considered one of the world's greatest dance companies. The Company's repertory, which includes classic works in addition to new commissions from contemporary choreographers, possesses an unparalleled breadth and creates unique experiences for audiences around the world.



Limón Dance

Credit / limon.nyc

Numerous honors have been bestowed upon both José Limón and the Company he founded 75 years ago, including the White House's 2008 National Medal of Arts for Lifetime Achievement. Additionally, the Company was the first modern dance group to tour under the auspices of the State Department and to perform at Lincoln Center. According to dance critic Deborah Jowitz, "all the performers have a beautiful understanding of Limón's rich, strong style and the curving gestures that suspend - as in a caught breath -

yet acknowledge the pull of the earth." Learn more at [limon.nyc](https://limon.nyc).

## TICKETS

To purchase tickets, call NJPAC at 1.888.GO.NJPAC (1.888.466.5722)

or visit [NJPAC.org/dance](https://NJPAC.org/dance).

(Mabel Pais writes on The Arts and Entertainment, Social Issues, Spirituality, Education, Cuisine, Health & Wellness, and Business)



## Ranbir Kapoor undergoes extensive vocal training for Ramayana

The pre-production of Nitesh Tiwari's *Ramayana*, starring Ranbir Kapoor, is reportedly in full swing. As per an India Today report, Ranbir will undergo extensive vocal training to play the part of Lord Ram in the film as Nitesh wants Ranbir to sound 'different'. The film also stars Sai Pallavi and Yash as Sita and Ravan, respectively.

As per the report, the *Dangal* director is leaving no stone unturned and is doing ample homework. It claimed that he has created a separate team for the diction and dialogue department, which will work closely with the actors. According to the report, Ranbir has already been put on to a diction expert who will ensure that his dialogue delivery aligns with the director's vision. They claim there's also a special emphasis on costumes.

India Today quoting a source stated, "Ranbir has a certain baritone and a way of speaking his lines. It is symbolic and if you have even closed your eyes, you can recognise a dialogue purely based on Ranbir's voice. In *Ramayana*, Nitesh wants to make sure he sounds different from the characters he's played in the past. Being a versatile actor, he is enjoying this process of trying something new."

## Esha Deol announces divorce after 11 years of marriage

Esha Deol and husband Bharat Takhtani announced their divorce after 11 years of marriage. The couple issued a joint statement saying that the separation is "amicable".

Esha is the daughter of Bollywood couple Dharmendra and Hema Malini.

"We have mutually and amicably decided to part ways. Through this shift in our lives, the best interests and welfare of our two children is and will be of utmost importance to us. We'd appreciate our privacy is respected," says the statement issued to Delhi Times.

# Hrithik-Deepika's 'Fighter' song 'Bekaar Dil' added to film 2 weeks after release

Hrithik Roshan and Deepika Padukone's *'Fighter'* is currently running in theatres. It released on January 25. Now, ahead of the much-awaited Valentine's Day, the film's director Siddharth Anand treated the viewers with yet another track. Titled 'Bekaar Dil', the makers will release the song in theatres on February 9.

The makers of *'Fighter'* are gearing up to release the romantic song 'Bekaar Dil' in the theatres on Friday. The song has already garnered love from audience across. Siddharth Anand shared the announcement on his X handle on Thursday and wrote, "The love anthem from *Fighter* - #BekaarDil in Cinemas all over India from the Friday. After many years this is happening..a song is added into the film 2 weeks after release! And!! Watch #ishqjaisakuch 1 minute AFTER the end titles!! Wait for it!!! It's worth it (sic)!"

Meanwhile, *'Fighter'* successfully completed two weeks of theatrical run. On its 14th day in theatres, the aerial actioner saw a slight slump in collections in India. Now, all eyes are on the weekend to see if there would be an incline in numbers. *'Fighter'* grossed over Rs 300 crore at the box office worldwide and is still going strong.

In India, the film is marching towards the Rs 200-crore (net) mark and is



expected to touch the milestone in less than a week. On Day 14, February 7, the film is estimated to have earned Rs 2.75 crore (net) at the domestic box office.

The 14-day total collection of *'Fighter'* now stands at Rs 184.50 crore net in the country. On February 7, the film had an

overall occupancy of 10.17 per cent in India.

Produced by Viacom18 Studios and Marflix Pictures, the film has references to the 2019 Pulwama attack, 2019 Balakot airstrike and 2019 India-Pakistan border clashes.

## Alia Bhatt comes onboard for crime series Poacher as executive producer

Prime Video recently announced that actor, producer and entrepreneur Alia Bhatt has come onboard as executive producer for its upcoming Amazon Original series, *Poacher*.

An investigative crime series based on true events, *Poacher*, unearths the largest ivory poaching ring in Indian history. Emmy-award winning filmmaker Richie Mehta has created, written and directed the series, which boasts of a diverse and talented cast, comprising Nimisha Sajayan, Roshan Mathew and Dibyendu Bhattacharya in pivotal roles.

*Poacher*, which unfolds primarily in Malayalam, Hindi and English, is set to premiere on February 23.

Talking about coming onboard as the executive producer for *Poacher*, Alia Bhatt says, "Being part of this incredibly significant project is an honour, for both me and the entire team at Eternal Sunshine Productions. The impact of *Poacher* was deeply personal, and Richie's portrayal of the urgent issue of wildlife crime resonated strongly with me and the team. The storytelling genuinely moved me, especially knowing it's based on true events that sheds light on brutal crimes occurring in our forests. I am confident that *Poacher* will serve as an eye-opener, delivering a powerful message to be more compassionate and considerate towards all living beings. It's a call to embrace co-existence and I am genuinely thrilled to be collaborating with Richie, QC and Prime Video and to contribute to this narrative."





## Spider-Man actor to star in Romeo and Juliet

Tom Holland is making a theatre comeback with Shakespeare's classic Romeo and Juliet. The Spider-Man star will return to London's West End for his role as Romeo Montague in a new theatrical production. Starting Saturday, May 11, Romeo and Juliet will run through Saturday, August 3, at Duke of York's Theatre in London. It is produced by the Jamie Lloyd Company, famous for its adaptation of plays like Sunset Boulevard, The Effect, and Cyrano de Bergerac.

Recently, the director of the Holland-starrer Romeo and Juliet theatrical adaptation, Jamie Lloyd, revealed his excitement over the White Lotus star's casting in his production. "Tom Holland is one of the greatest, most exciting young actors in the world. It is an honor to welcome him back to the West End," he said in a statement, per Independent.

# Kevin Spacey returns to big screen as hitman in Peter Five

The trailer of director Michael Zaiko Hall's Peter Five Eight, starring Kevin Spacey, Rebecca De Mornay, Jet Jandreau and Jake Webber, was released on Tuesday. The film marks a comeback for Kevin, who was cleared in a UK court in July last year for sexually assaulting four men. The trailer sees him play a hitman in his comeback role.

In the trailer, Kevin's character Peter can be seen disposing of a body, holding a woman at knifepoint and referring to himself as a 'fallen soul.' The trailer reveals that he infiltrates a small town at the behest of his boss to murder a real estate agent with a dark secret. He's also shown to be spending the night with Rebecca's Brenda in a brief, raunchy scene. He later clicks photographs of her with Jet's Sam. But things turn sinister when a mystery man calls Peter and asks him to 'make it messy.' It also shows how Sam is also involved in something shady.

The film's tagline, which DailyMail reports had a budget of \$5-10 million, reads "In this town, nothing is what it seems." Director Michael also told the publication, "Rebecca De Mornay, Jake Weber and Jet Jandreau all play wonderfully in this world - while Kevin Spacey has crafted a unique and memorable character for his fans to enjoy." The film is slated to release on March 22.

Kevin rose to fame for his roles in



films like American Beauty and shows like House of Cards. However, in 2017, he was accused of abusing his fame and power to carry out nine assaults on four men. Kevin denied the allegations, insisting that the claims

were for 'money.' In July 2023, he was cleared of the charges in the UK. He was sacked from House of Cards when the allegations first surfaced and was edited out of Ridley Scott's film All The Money In The World.

## Alison Brie, Dave Franco to feature in horror film 'Together'

Hollywood actor-couple Dave Franco and Alison Brie are set to star together in an upcoming horror film. Titled Together, the movie will be directed by debutant writer-director Michael Shanks.

Though the details of the plot have been kept under wraps, the movie is based around co-dependency and will be told in a unique way. Franco and Brie, who tied the knot in 2017, most recently collaborated for romantic comedy Somebody I Used to Know, which was released in 2023. The duo also starred together in The Little Hours and The Disaster Artist in 2017, as well as The Rental (2020), which marked Franco's directorial debut.

They will also produce Together along with Picturestart, Tango, 1.21 and Princess Pictures. Franco recently starred alongside Kristen Stewart in studio A24's Love Lies Bleeding, which had its world premiere at the Sundance Film Festival. Brie will be next seen in American streamer Peacock's limited series Apples Never Fall, also starring Annette Bening, Sam Neill and Jake Lacy.



## 'I'd spent years trying to get Barbie going': Margot Robbie

Margot Robbie-starrer Barbie was the biggest blockbuster of last year. The actor who also produced the film, has now opened up about overcoming 'actor crisis' filming began on Barbie in an interview with Los Angeles Times. Writer-director Greta Gerwig also recalled the time when the actor was having a meltdown on the prospect of taking on the role.



Speaking with Los Angeles Times, Margot Robbie said, "I went to Greta's house and had that crisis. I'd spent years trying to get this movie going. And suddenly we're going to shoot the thing. I was like, 'Oh my God, I dunno how to do this.' It happens before every single movie I've ever done. A few weeks out, I have this meltdown where I'm like, 'What am I doing? I don't know how to act. Everyone's going to suddenly realize that I can't do any of this, and it's going to be terrible.' And then it is just sheer panic."

## AHEAD OF ASSAULT, ISRAEL PM BENJAMIN NETANYAHU ORDERS RAFAH EVACUATION

**DOHA/JERUSALEM (TIP):** Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu ordered the military on February 9 to draw up a dual plan to evacuate Palestinian civilians from the crowded southern Gazan city of Rafah and defeat the last Hamas fighters there. His office announced the move as pressure mounted on Israel over its threat to launch a ground assault on Rafah, the last refuge for hundreds of thousands of Palestinians who are trapped in the city after fleeing fighting elsewhere.

US President Joe Biden said on Thursday Israel's response to the October 7 attacks by Hamas militants was "over the top" and Washington said it would not support any military operation launched in Rafah without due consideration for civilians.

Aid groups said there would be a high Palestinian death toll if Israeli forces stormed Rafah, and warned of the growing humanitarian crisis in the city, on the border with Egypt.

"It is impossible to achieve the goal of the war without eliminating Hamas. It is clear that intense activity in Rafah requires that civilians evacuate the areas of combat," Netanyahu's office said in a statement. — Reuters

# Former Dutch prime minister Dries van Agt and his wife die 'hand in hand' by euthanasia at age 93

**THE HAGUE (TIP):** Dries van Agt, the Christian Democrat prime minister of the Netherlands from 1977 until 1982, has died by euthanasia, "hand in hand" together with his wife, according to the human rights organisation he founded. They both were 93.

The news was made public on February 9 by The Rights Forum, which said the couple died on Monday and would be buried in a private ceremony in the eastern city of Nijmegen.

"He died hand in hand with his beloved wife Eugenie van Agt-Krekelberg, the support and anchor with whom he was together for more than 70 years and whom he always continued to refer to as my girl," the non-profit organisation said in a statement.

The two had been in fragile health for some time. In 2019, Van Agt suffered a brain haemorrhage while giving a speech at a commemoration event for Palestinians and never fully recovered.

A Christian Democrat from traditional Dutch stock, Van Agt became increasingly progressive after he departed politics, ultimately leaving his party in 2017 over ideological differences with the centre-right



Christian Democratic Appeal's approach to Israel and the Palestinians.

Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte, who referred to Van Agt as his "great-great-grandfather in office," spoke highly of the former politician.

"With his flowery and unique language, his clear convictions and his striking presentation, Dries van Agt gave colour and substance to Dutch politics in a time of polarisation and party renewal," Rutte said in a statement.

The Dutch royal family also praised him. "He took administrative

responsibility in a turbulent time and managed to inspire many with his striking personality and colourful style," King Willem-Alexander, Queen Máxima and Princess Beatrix said in a joint statement.

Van Agt was known for his archaic references and grandiose language, as well as his passion for cycling. He was forced to quit that hobby in 2019 after a fall.

Together with the right-wing Liberal Party, the Christian Democrat Appeal governed the Netherlands with Van Agt as prime minister from 1977 until 1981. After elections, he again became prime minister, forming a coalition with the Labour Party and the centrist Democrats 66 in a government that held for a year.

Following a visit to Israel in 1999, he became increasingly vocal about his support for the Palestinian people. He referred to his experience of the trip as a "conversion". In 2009, he founded The Rights Forum, which advocates for a "just and sustainable Dutch and European policy regarding the Palestine/Israel issue," according to the non-profit organisation.

He is survived by his three children.

## Strikes kill 13 in Gaza as President Joe Biden describes Israel's military response as 'over the top'

**RAFAH (GAZA STRIP) (TIP):** Israeli airstrikes killed at least 13 people in Rafah in the Gaza Strip after PM Benjamin Netanyahu rejected Hamas' cease-fire terms and vowed to expand the offensive into the southern Gaza town.

President Joe Biden called Israel's military response in Gaza "over the top" and said he continues to work "tirelessly" to press Israel and Hamas to agree on an extended pause in fighting.

"I am of the view, as you know, that the conduct of the response in the Gaza Strip has been over the top," Biden told reporters in an exchange on February 8 evening after delivering remarks on a special counsel report on his handling of classified documents.

Biden has been under political pressure to mend any rifts with voters he might need, especially in the Arab American community, where he has faced increased backlash for his vocal support of Israel's war in Gaza. On Thursday, he sent emissaries to a suburb of Detroit, where the nation's largest concentration of Arab Americans resides.

More than half of the Gaza Strip's population has fled to Rafah, a city on the mostly sealed border with Egypt that is also the main entry point for humanitarian aid. Egypt has warned that



any ground operation there or mass displacement across the border would undermine its 40-year-old peace treaty with Israel.

The strikes killed at least 13 people, including two women and five children, according to the Kuwaiti Hospital, which received the bodies. At the scene of one of the strikes, residents used their mobile phone flashlights as they dug through the

rubble with pick-axes and their bare hands.

"I wish we could collect their whole bodies instead of just pieces," said Mohammed Abu Habib, a neighbour who witnessed the strike.

Israel's 4-month-old air and ground offensive - among the most destructive in recent history - has killed over 27,000 Palestinians, driven most people from

their homes and pushed a quarter of the population toward starvation.

PM Netanyahu has said the offensive would continue and expand until "total victory" over Hamas, which started the war by launching a wide-ranging attack into southern Israel on October 7 in which militants killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took around 250 hostages.

Biden has pushed for an extended pause in the fighting to facilitate the release of the remaining hostages after brief pauses earlier that had allowed for the release of mostly women and children. More than 100 are still captive and Israel has vowed to bring them back.

However, Hamas has demanded that Israel release hundreds of Palestinian prisoners and end the war as part of a hostage deal. PM Netanyahu has refused to agree to those terms.

Biden said he still is hopeful that a deal can be worked out that might create a path to ending the war.

"I am pushing very hard now to deal with this hostage cease-fire," Biden said. "I've been working tirelessly on this deal." Israel's goals appear increasingly elusive, as Hamas reemerges in parts of northern Gaza, which was the first target of the offensive and has seen widespread destruction. (AP)

# Britain's King Charles diagnosed with cancer; PM Modi, global leaders wish him speedy recovery

**LONDON (TIP):** Leaders of several countries, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, have wished King Charles III a "speedy recovery" after Buckingham Palace announced that the monarch was diagnosed with a form of cancer.

King Charles III has been diagnosed with cancer following his recent hospital procedure for a benign prostate enlargement, Buckingham Palace said in a statement on February 6.

While the palace has not specified the form of cancer, it said the 75-year-old monarch has started treatment and remains "wholly positive".

After the news about the monarch's health was out, UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak wished King Charles a "speedy recovery".

The prime minister led global well-wishes to the King, posting on social media platform X, "Wishing His Majesty a full and speedy recovery".

"I have no doubt he'll be back to full strength in no time and I know the whole country will be wishing him well," he said.

The King has begun a schedule of regular treatments and has been advised to postpone his public-facing duties.

Former prime ministers Liz Truss, Boris Johnson and Sir Tony Blair posted similar messages, with Johnson saying: "The whole country will be rooting for the King today."

Prime Minister Narendra Modi also wished Britain's King Charles III, a speedy recovery and good health. Modi



posted on X, "I join the people of India in wishing speedy recovery and good health to His Majesty King Charles III."

Across the Atlantic, US President Joe Biden said he was "concerned" about King Charles and planned to call him later.

The US president told reporters: "I'm concerned about him. Just heard about his diagnosis. I'll be talking to him, God willing," he said.

US former president Donald Trump called the King a "wonderful man, who I got to know well during my presidency".

Writing on his Truth Social platform in all capital letters, he added: "We all pray that he has a fast and full recovery!"

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said: "I like Canadians across the country and people around the world, I am thinking of His Majesty King Charles III as he undergoes treatment for cancer.

"We're sending him our very best wishes - and hoping for a fast and full recovery".

In the UK, messages poured in from across the political spectrum, with leaders of all the main parties wishing the King a full recovery.

Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer tweeted: "On behalf of the Labour Party, I wish His Majesty all the very best for his recovery." (PTI)

## BLINKEN MEETS SAUDI CROWN PRINCE AMID WEST ASIA TENSIONS

**RIYADH/JERUSALEM (TIP):** US Secretary of State Antony Blinken arrived in Saudi Arabia on February 6, his first stop in a Middle East tour as Washington tries to advance negotiations on a normalisation deal between the kingdom and Israel, and make progress on talks for postwar Gaza governance.

Blinken is also set to visit Egypt, Qatar and Israel this week and push to advance the Egyptian- and Qatari-mediated conversations with Hamas to achieve a hostage deal.

After a weekend of retaliatory strikes, the US on Sunday warned Iran and the militias it arms and funds that it will conduct more attacks if American forces in the West Asia continue to be targeted, but that it does not want an "open-ended military campaign" across the region. "We are prepared to deal with anything," said Jake Sullivan, President Joe Biden's national security adviser. Sullivan said Iran should expect "a swift and forceful response" if it — and not one of its proxies — "chose to respond directly" against the US.

Sullivan delivered the warnings after the US and Britain on Saturday struck 36 Houthi targets in Yemen. The Iran-backed militants have fired on American and international interests repeatedly in the wake of the Israel-Hamas war. An air assault Friday in Iraq and Syria targeted other Iranian-backed militias and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard in retaliation for the drone strike that killed three US troops in Jordan recently. — Reuters

## China 'pressuring' eminent monks and admn in Tibet to denounce Dalai Lama

**TIBET (TIP):** With Losar (Tibetan new year) approaching, China is allegedly pressuring eminent monks and monastic administrators in the Tibetan Autonomous Region to denounce the Dalai Lama.

Tibetan government-in-exile sources said that the Chinese authorities in Tibetan-populated areas of Tibet visited at least 35 Buddhist monasteries and urged eminent monks to "deeply expose and denounce" the Dalai Lama and safeguard the "unity of the motherland". They visited the monasteries in Kardze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture from January 11 to 17, according to a statement issued by the United Front Work Department, which oversees the Chinese Government's domestic and external influence operations.

Tibetan New Year, known as Losar, falls on February 10, the same day as China's Lunar New Year, the biggest holiday of the year. A report of the Tibetan government-in-exile says that the Chinese authorities accuse the Tibetan spiritual leader, who lives in exile in Dharamsala, of trying to split the Tibet Autonomous Region and other Tibetan-populated areas in China's Sichuan and Qinghai provinces from the rest of the country.



However, the Dalai Lama does not advocate for independence but rather a "middle way" that accepts Tibet's status as part of China. He urges greater cultural and religious freedom, including strengthening language rights that are guaranteed for ethnic minorities under China's constitution.

The Tibetan government-in-exile says that Chinese officials visited well-known monasteries in the area, including Palyul, Yarchen Gar and Katog, which are associated with the Nyingma School of Vajrayana

Buddhism. The Chinese officials urged Tibetan monks to promote the "five identifications" that President Xi Jinping had repeatedly said was required of all Chinese citizens and minority groups. These are identifying with the motherland, Chinese nation, Chinese culture, Chinese Communist Party and socialism with Chinese characteristics.

The Tibetan government-in-exile said that Tibet watchers criticised the move as disingenuous and an effort to put pressure on the Tibetan monastic community to toe the Chinese Communist Party's line.

"The Chinese Government's practice of extending greetings and monetary gifts to Tibetan monks and nuns on important occasions and holidays are actually tools of deception," said Dawa Tsering, director of the Tibet Policy Institute, official think tank of the Central Tibetan Administration in Dharamsala.

The Tibetan government-in-exile alleged that in their New Year message to Tibetan Buddhist leaders in Palyul county, the Chinese authorities also ordered head monks to carry out an "in-depth, systematic study and political education" of the "party's religious work theories and principles and policies". (TNS)

# Pakistan elections: US, UK step in as both Imran Khan, Nawaz Sharif declare victory; results drag on

**ISLAMABAD (TIP):** The United States, Britain and the European Union on February 9 separately expressed concerns about Pakistan's electoral process in the wake of a vote on Thursday and urged a probe into reported irregularities.

The main battle was between former prime minister Nawaz Sharif's party and candidates backed by ex-prime minister Imran Khan. Both declared victory separately.

Elections were held for 265 seats in the national assembly and a political party needs 133 seats for a simple majority.

The US and the EU both mentioned allegations of interference, including arrests of activists, and added that claims of irregularities, interference and fraud should be fully investigated.

Khan is in jail and his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party has been barred from the polls. Independents, most of them backed by Khan, had won the most seats - 98 of the 245 counted by 1830 GMT - while Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party had won 69 seats.

Khan believes the powerful military is behind a crackdown to hound his party out of existence, while analysts and



opponents say Sharif is being backed by the generals.

The EU statement noted a "lack of a level playing field", attributing that to "the inability of some political actors to contest the elections" and to restrictions to freedom of assembly, freedom of expression and internet access.

The U.S. State Department said there were "undue restrictions" on freedoms of

expressions and assembly while noting violence and attacks on media workers.

Some U.S. lawmakers such as Democratic U.S. Representatives Ro Khanna and Ilhan Omar also expressed concerns, with Khanna saying "the military is interfering and rigging the result." Both Khanna and Omar urged the State Department not to recognize a winner until investigations are

conducted into allegations of misconduct.

Michael Kugelman, director of the South Asia Institute at the Wilson Center think tank in Washington, said both EU and U.S. State Department statements were "relatively mild ...

considering the great scale of the rigging that went down." Earlier this week, the U.N. human rights office denounced violence against political parties and candidates. It voiced concern over the "pattern of harassment, arrests and prolonged detentions of leaders and supporters" of Khan's party.

The EU, the US and Britain said they would work with the next government and did not congratulate any candidate or party. British foreign minister David Cameron's statement noted "serious concerns raised about the fairness and lack of inclusivity of the elections."

Multiple legal cases have been brought against Khan, which disqualified him as a candidate and sentenced him to long prison terms. He denies wrongdoing.

Khan was ousted in 2022 after falling out with the country's powerful military, which denies meddling in politics. His party won the last national election in 2018. (Reuters)

## 5 KILLED IN MILITANT ATTACKS AS PAKISTAN VOTES TO ELECT NEW GOVERNMENT

**ISLAMABAD (TIP):** At least five people were killed in militant attacks as Pakistan held a General Election on February 8 after temporarily suspending mobile phone services across the country and closing some land borders to maintain law and order.

The Interior Ministry said it took the steps after at least 26 people were killed in two explosions near electoral candidates' offices in the southwestern province of Balochistan on Wednesday. Islamic State later claimed responsibility for those attacks.

"As a result of the recent incidents of terrorism in the country precious lives have been lost, security measures are essential to maintain the law and order situation and deal with possible threats," the ministry said in a post on messaging platform X.

Thousands of troops were deployed on the streets and at polling stations across the country and borders with Iran and Afghanistan were temporarily closed.

Four policemen were killed in a bomb blast and firing targeting a police patrol in the Kulachi area of Dera Ismail Khan district in the northwest, local police chief Rauf Qaisrani said. (Reuters)

## Sri Lanka arrests 23 Indian fishermen for poaching in its waters

**COLOMBO (TIP):** The Sri Lankan Navy has arrested 23 Indian fishermen and seized two trawlers for allegedly poaching in the island nation's waters, according to an official statement here.

The fishermen were arrested and their trawlers were seized, on February 10, north of the Delft island in Jaffna, the Sri Lanka Navy said in a press release on February 6.

The apprehended fishermen and their trawlers were escorted to the Kankesanthurai Harbour and would be handed over to the Mailadi Fisheries Inspector for further action, it said.

"The Sri Lanka Navy conducted a special operation to chase away Indian poaching trawlers from Sri Lankan waters on the night of February 3, 2024. The operation resulted in the seizure of 2 Indian trawlers and the apprehension of 23 Indian nationals poaching in the northern waters of Sri Lanka, off the Delft island in Jaffna," the statement said.

The Navy conducts regular patrols and operations in Sri Lankan waters to curb illegal fishing practices by foreign fishing trawlers, taking into account the consequences of these practices on the livelihood of local fishermen.

In continuation of these efforts, the Northern Naval Command deployed Fast Attack Craft belonging to the Navy and Sri Lanka Coast Guard to chase away a cluster of Indian poaching trawlers, as the trawlers were detected engaging in illegal fishing in Sri Lankan waters.

The fishermen issue is a contentious one in the ties between India and Sri Lanka, with Lankan Navy personnel even firing at Indian fishermen in the Palk Strait and seizing their boats in several alleged incidents of illegally entering Sri Lankan territorial waters.

The Palk Strait, a narrow strip of water separating Tamil Nadu from Sri Lanka, is a rich fishing ground for fishermen from both countries.

There have been periodic instances of Indian fishermen being arrested by Sri Lankan authorities for allegedly crossing the International Maritime Boundary Line and fishing in Sri Lankan waters. (PTI)

## Bangladesh FM, NSA Ajit Doval discuss Rohingya issue

**DHAKA (TIP):** External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and Bangladesh Foreign Minister Hasan Mahmud on Wednesday reviewed the progress in wide-ranging areas of bilateral relations, including cross-border connectivity, economic and development partnership, cooperation in defence and security, power, energy, water resources and people-to-people exchanges.

Mahmud, who is on his first bilateral visit to any country, earlier in the day met NSA Ajit Doval to discuss the Rohingya issue. The criticality of the issue was flagged by Doval's weekend dash to Dhaka to speak on the dilemma facing both countries on the intensified fighting in Myanmar which is raising fears of a further civilian influx. Besides delegation-level talks, Jaishankar also hosted a dinner in his honour. Earlier, Mahmud visited Rajghat to pay homage to Mahatma Gandhi. (TNS)

## 12 Bangladeshi nationals charge-sheeted by NIA in Bengaluru human trafficking case

**BENGALURU/NEW DELHI (TIP):** The NIA has filed a charge sheet against 12 Bangladeshi nationals for their alleged involvement in the infiltration and trafficking of foreign nationals into India via the India-Bangladesh border, an official said on February 8. The charge sheet was filed in a special NIA court in Bengaluru on Monday under relevant sections of the law. The accused had entered India illegally, without valid travel documents, and had fraudulently obtained Indian identity documents, a spokesperson of the federal agency said. According to the National Investigation Agency (NIA), they were trafficked through the porous Indo-Bangla border points in West Bengal and Tripura, with the help of touts operating on both sides of the border.

Eight of them had subsequently been involved in trafficking of several other Bangladeshi nationals in a similar manner, the spokesperson said. The official said a total of 22 such victims of the accused have been identified so far by the agency, which has further found that the victims were lured into India on false promises of jobs and better livelihood. (PTI)



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# Aloe vera benefits for face and skin

**A**loe Vera, the modest houseplant is a 'miracle,' wonder plant, often hiding in plain sight. Having been around and used as a medicinal herb, it nourishes the body from the inside – it is rich in nutrients, aids in improving digestion and even boost immunity. Aloe Vera can be used topically too, i.e., its gel can be used to enhance one's skin, especially the face and the hair.

However, before we get into the essential reasons and health benefits of Aloe Vera, let us first learn how to extract Aloe Vera gel directly from the plant. If you have an Aloe Vera plant at home, select its fatter leaves or stems and cut it from the base. Or you may pull the leaves from their bottom. Be careful as the plant has thorns.

## Helps soothe sunburn

Aloe Vera gel has cooling properties and is anti-inflammatory. Hence, it is one of the most natural remedies for sunburn or burnt skin. Applying this gel helps with a protective layer for the skin, and it also helps to retain moisture. It is rich in antioxidants and minerals that boost the healing process. So now you can maintain your summer skin health using aloe vera.

## Helps to moisturize the skin

Unlike regular, market-bought moisturizers, Aloe Vera gel when used as a moisturizing gel doesn't leave a greasy film on the face and the skin. In fact, it does just the opposite – it unclogs the pores and softens the skin.

It can be used as an aftershave treatment. This is because the Aloe Vera gel helps to keep the skin hydrated and heals burns by razors and smaller nicks & cuts. It also helps treat dry skin.

## Boosts healing of wounds

It is now a known fact that Aloe Vera is highly beneficial for burns, cuts, and other injuries. This is because Aloe Vera boosts the healing of wounds, i.e., reduces the time of healing. This is true especially in the case of 1st degree and 2nd-degree burns. It's a great skin burn treatment. It also helps to speed up skin cell reproduction as much as eight times. Aloe Vera is also known to penetrate the epidermis, i.e., the outer layer of the skin faster than water.



## Fights skin-ageing

Aloe Vera gel has vitamin C and E, beta-carotene in abundance. Therefore, it has anti-ageing properties. It also contains antimicrobial properties and is anti-inflammatory. It also helps to eradicate skin blemishes and diminish age lines. Additionally, it helps to increase the production of collagen in the body and skin elasticity.

## Reduces infection and acne

Those who suffer from acne will find respite in Aloe Vera. It helps in gentle cleansing, and its antimicrobial properties treat pimples without causing any damages to the skin. It is an antiseptic that allows protection against bacteria. Aloe Vera contains polysaccharides and gibberellins. These help in the growth of new cells and at the same time, reduce inflammation and redness. It also works as an astringent that reduces the size of pores, flushing out the excess sebum, microbes, and dirt.



## Non-gym weight loss tips

### Be the boss of your TV remote and turn it off

According to a Food Quality & Preference study, people who dine in a loud and noisy setting are less likely to really taste what they're eating. People tend to overlook the subtle flavours of the food and eat more when they eat while watching TV. So, switch that TV off and enjoy your food. You will feel fuller, more satiated and less tempted to binge on seconds and thirds.

### Don't eat at your desk

According to a study published in The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, people who eat in front of the computer are 'distracted eaters' and find it hard to recall what they eat. Thus, they tend to overeat mindlessly. So, simply go to your pantry, sit in a group, enjoy eating your food, and avoid mindless munching.

### When shopping, eat first and shop later

If you shop on an empty stomach, chances are you'll be tempted to binge at the food court later on. Nibble on a snack or a two before you hit the malls and stores. This will help you stay away from impulsive and unhealthy food choices. Or better still? Munch on an apple and eat it all the way while shopping.

### Plan ahead and prepare a shopping list

Pen down all the items you need and stick to your food list. Shopping without setting a goal in your mind may tempt you to buy things that you don't need. Not only will this keep clutter at bay, it'll also help you stick to planned, balanced meals - all on a budget that's healthy for your wallet as well.

## FOOD CORNER

# PEPPER ROAST CHICKEN

## INGREDIENTS

8 chicken thighs, 1 teaspoon black pepper, 1 teaspoon, coriander powder, salt as required, 40 curry leaves, 1/2 teaspoon black mustard seeds, 1 teaspoon tamarind extract, 1 tablespoon finely chopped curry leaves, 4 tablespoon coconut oil, 1 teaspoon cumin powder, 1 teaspoon turmeric, 2 cloves, minced garlic, 2 sliced green chilli, 1 medium chopped onion, 1/4 cup chopped coriander leaves

## METHOD

- Preheat oven to 420F.
- Line a baking tray with parchment. In large mixing bowl combine chicken, 2 tbsp oil, 1/2 tsp of black pepper, turmeric, cumin and coriander.

- Add salt to taste, half of the garlic, ginger and curry leaves. Mix well, cover and marinate in refrigerator for 1/2 hour.
- To cook chicken, spread it in a single layer on baking tray, scraping up all the marinade over it. Oven roast for 20 min or until lightly browned and crisped.
- Warm remaining oil in deep skillet over medium heat. Add mustard seeds, let splutter 30 sec. Add remaining garlic, ginger, curry leaves, saute for 1 min.
- Add onions, saute for 5-7 min until they are softened and lightly browned. Add remaining turmeric, black pepper, cumin and coriander as well as more salt if necessary. Cook 1 min.
- Mix in the tamarind extract or lemon juice, water and chicken with all it's juices. Reduce heat to low and cook covered for 12 - 15 min, stirring occasionally.
- The sauce should be very thick and clingy at this point. Fold in the fresh coriander, slivered curry leaves and fresh sliced chili, serve.



# New heart treatment to help grow a replacement valve inside body

Replacement heart valves that grow inside the body may be a step closer to reality. Researchers at the Imperial College London and Harefield Hospital in the UK have developed a novel treatment that harnesses body's natural repair mechanisms to build a living heart valve.

The results are published in the journal *Communications Biology*.

"The aim of the concept we've developed is to produce a living valve in the body, which would be able to grow with the patient," said Yuan-Tsan Tseng, a biomaterials scientist working at the Imperial's National Heart and Lung Institute and the Harefield Heart Science Centre.

Heart valve replacement is a life-saving treatment, but it is rarely a long-term solution. Both mechanical and biological valves have their own drawbacks. Patients with mechanical valves must take drugs for the rest of their lives to prevent blood clotting.

Biological valves, on the other hand, only last between 10 to 15 years. The treatment is particularly challenging for children with congenital heart defects, as the valves do not grow along with their bodies and must be replaced several times before they reach adulthood.

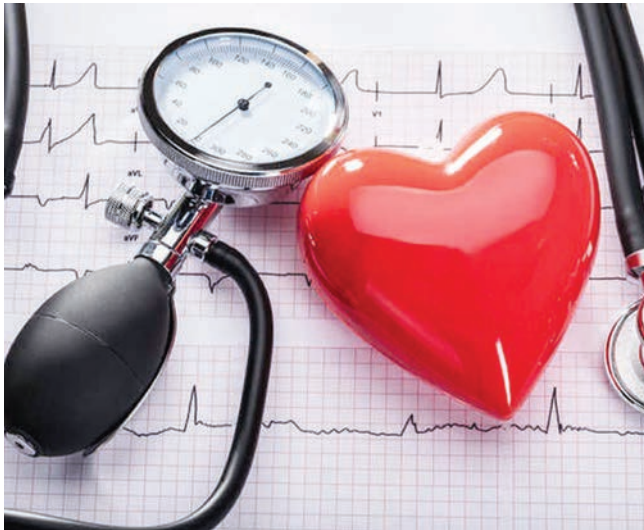
The new procedure begins with a nanofibrous polymeric valve, but made from a biodegradable polymer scaffold rather than a durable plastic.

"Once this is inside the body, the scaffold recruits cells and instructs their development, so that the body works as a bioreactor to grow new tissues," Tseng explained. "The scaffold gradually degrades and is replaced by our body's own tissues."

The scaffold material used to make the valve is the key innovation. "It has the capability to attract, house, and instruct appropriate cells from the patient's own body, thereby facilitating tissue generation and maintaining valve function."

The team transplanted the valve into sheep and monitored for up to six months.

"The valves performed well," Tseng said. "They



continued to function for the six months of the trial, and also showed good cellular regeneration."

In particular, the study shows that the scaffold was able to attract cells from the blood stream which then developed into functional tissues, a process known as endothelial-to-mesenchymal transformation.

"We've also seen nerves and fatty tissues growing in the scaffold, as we might expect in a normal valve."

Meanwhile, the polymer could be seen degrading to make way for the new tissue.

"If there was no regeneration, the valve would fall apart as the polymer degrades. But what we see is continuing functionality, and that means cell regeneration is taking place over time. That proves that our idea of in-vivo regeneration is working."

More work is required to determine exactly which processes are causing the polymer to degenerate and how closely it is linked to tissue regeneration.

"But the tissue regeneration is definitely sufficient to cover the structural integrity and functionality of the valve," Tseng said. The team aims to get regulatory approval for the first clinical trials, hopefully in the next five years or so.

Source: IANS



## Natural painkillers in your kitchen

With a substandard and a sedentary lifestyle, popping medicines has become a part of our everyday humdrum. We don't even think twice before gulping down a Saridon or a Crocin but what we don't realize is how toxic such dependence can become. 'Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food', said Hippocrates. So, here we list down foods that act as natural pain killers and the good news is - they do not have side effects.

### Tart Cherry

We may not know this but tart cherries are very good at relieving pain. They contain antioxidant compounds called anthocyanins which help in suppressing inflammatory compounds and pain.

### Turmeric

The ingredient that gives turmeric its yellow colour is spice curcumin. It has anti-inflammatory properties that are comparable to over-the-counter antibiotics medicines available. It is effective in alleviating joint and muscular pain and swelling.

### Ginger

Anti-inflammatory properties of ginger can help alleviate pain from arthritis, stomach ache, chest pain, menstrual pain and even muscle soreness.

### Red Grapes

This, too, is a not-so-popular remedy for pain. It contains an antioxidant compound called resveratrol that gives it its red colour. Resveratrol helps in maintaining cartilage health, preventing joint and back pain.

### Peppermint

Peppermint is known for its therapeutic properties as it helps in relieving muscular pain, toothache, headache and pain in nerves. It helps ease digestion and stomach problems. Besides, it also has a soothing impact on your mind and memory.

## Viruses living in human gut play a quiet role in stress management, finds study

While viruses are typically viewed as harmful to health, a subset of viruses residing in the gut might play a crucial role in stress regulation.

According to a new study, this discovery contributes to the growing body of evidence indicating that interactions between the gut and the brain influence human behaviour.

This research potentially paves the way for treatments targeting viruses within our bodies for stress-related conditions.

While previous studies have primarily focused on the changes in gut bacteria composition in response to stress, this new research sheds light on the

"virome," an area that has been largely unexplored in understanding its interaction with bacteria and its impact on stress-related health and diseases.

Dr Nathaniel Ritz from the APC Microbiome Ireland research centre at University College Cork emphasised the potential of targeting the virome to alleviate the effects of stress.

The study, led by Ritz and his colleagues, specifically focused on a subset of viruses known as bacteriophages, which infect and replicate alongside bacteria.

Chronic social stress exposure in mice resulted in alterations in the composition of both the viruses and bacteria in their guts. Subsequent

experiments involved harvesting viruses from the faeces of unstressed, healthy animals and transplanting them into mice subjected to chronic social stress.

The findings, published in *Nature Microbiology*, suggested that these transplants reduced stress hormone levels and mitigated depression- and anxiety-like behaviours in the mice.

While further research is required to determine the potential benefits of virus transplants for humans with stress-related conditions, this study provides early evidence that gut viruses are involved in stress response, and manipulating them could hold therapeutic promise.

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# We are living in a 'digital dark age', here's how to protect your photos, videos and other data

If you have grown up with social media, chances are you have taken more photos in the last couple of decades than you will ever remember. When mobile phones suddenly became cameras too, social media turned into a community photo album, with memories kept online forever and ever. Or so we thought.

In 2019, MySpace lost 12 years' worth of music and photos, affecting over 14 million artists and 50 million tracks. If Instagram or the entire internet suddenly disappeared, would you be able to access your precious memories?

We are living in a "digital dark age", a term popularised by information and communication specialist Terry Kuny. Back in 1997, Kuny warned we were "moving into an era where much of what we know today, much of what is coded and written electronically, will be lost forever".

He argued that, like monks from the Middle Ages who preserved books (and therefore, knowledge), we must preserve digital objects of today. Otherwise, future generations will be left with gaps in knowledge about our present-day lives.

People often say the "internet is forever", but digital artefacts like photos and videos are actually unstable and non-permanent. You've likely encountered "linkrot", when a URL to an important source leads to a now-deleted webpage. Hardware becomes obsolete, degraded and upgraded over time. Bit-rot (also called data or file rot, or data degradation) means we may have no physical means to access our past data.

Many people already find it hard to use technology and software that has reached its "end of life". With the lack of backwards compatibility (when updated technology or software cannot support older versions), how will future generations access old data stored in obsolete formats?

We are also seeing issues emerge related to ownership of data, particularly when controlled by private corporations. Families have faced legal difficulties accessing the social media accounts of deceased loved ones. Similarly, if Spotify or Netflix shut down tomorrow,



you wouldn't own any of the songs or films you stream on a daily basis.

## A digital life

For a number of reasons, you may not even notice that we are in the middle of a new digital dark age.

From Google smart homes to contact-tracing technology, life is increasingly digital. Without an app, internet or social media account, it is difficult to verify your identity and gain access to data – even your own. Many people don't even consider non-digital means of recording, proving and living their existence.

With Instagram stories disappearing after 24 hours, and Snapchat and WhatsApp's vanishing messages features, you are probably used to data disappearing instantly.

With the growing need for environmental sustainability, turning to digital formats seems like the responsible solution to reducing our carbon footprint – though have you thought about the e-waste you produce?

Even with data protection laws now giving people the right to have personal data erased, many may not want their data to be preserved forever. Identity theft can occur with social media content that reveals biometric or other personal data. And that's not to mention cyberstalking, cyberbullying, the distribution of "revenge porn" and

online grooming.

But despite all these very understandable concerns, there are still good reasons to think seriously about how you preserve the digital artefacts and data that are most important to you.

## Protecting and preserving your old data

If you misplaced your phone, could you remember important phone numbers, or navigate streets when lost? If the answer is no, you may want to think more carefully about data preservation.

This is something we should all think about, and not just leave it to digital archivists and preservationists. When organised efforts are made to preserve data, who decides what should be preserved can become a political issue as much as a technological one.

When it comes to your own digital memories, there are services you can use and steps you can take to preserve data from being lost to history: Keep multiple copies (and formats) of important data across different devices: SD cards, USB thumb drives, DVD/Blu-ray discs, external hard drives and NAS (network attached storage) boxes. This has to be coupled with ensuring you regularly migrate important data to the newest device or format (remember, avoid bit-rot).

Try (re)discovering analogue trends – board games alongside video games, vinyl records over streaming music, or celebrate the resurgence of Polaroid cameras. Many services are available to convert digital photos into printed photos, albums and physical artwork.

Embrace the ethos of the FAIR principles) – findable, accessible, interoperable, and reusable – so that you and others can locate and access any important data you wish to preserve easily.

Finally, if you come across a rotten link or other missing data, you can explore data preservation initiatives like the Long Now Foundation's publicly accessible Rosetta Project or the Internet Archive, a non-profit library of free digital books, movies, software, music and websites.

Source: PTI

## Google calls out spyware firms and advocates for tighter regulation

Internet giant Google has named what it said are some of the worst offenders in the surveillance software industry and called on the United States and its allies to do more to rein in the sale and misuse of spy tools.

Spyware firms often say their products are meant for the use of governments for national security, but the technology has been repeatedly found to have been used to hack into the phones of civil society, political opposition and journalists in the last decade.

The industry has faced increasing scrutiny since the Israeli firm NSO's Pegasus spyware was found on the phones of various people globally, including human rights defenders.

In a report on Tuesday, Google researchers said that while NSO is better known, there are dozens of smaller firms contributing to the dangerous proliferation of spy technology.

The findings by Alphabet Inc's Google are significant because the company has



some of the best visibility into hacking campaigns globally, given the vast breadth of its online offerings.

"Demand from government customers remains strong and our findings underscore the extent to which commercial spyware vendors have proliferated hacking and spyware capabilities that weaken the safety of the Internet for all," researchers from Google's TAG threat-hunting team said in the report.

"The private sector is now responsible for a significant portion of the most sophisticated tools we detect." The United States and several of its allies committed last year to work toward curbing the surveillance software industry, after at least 50 U.S. government employees in 10 countries were found to have been targeted by spyware.

The Google researchers named a roster of firms that offer a range of services to break into phones, and have been evolving to bypass the latest security measures by Apple and Google for their phone operating systems iOS and Android. They include the Italian firms Cy4Gate and RCS Labs, Greek company Intellexa, and the lesser-known Italian company Negg Group and Spain's Variston. Negg Group's website says the company is focused on cybersecurity, but Google said its software was found to have been used to spy on people in Italy, Malaysia, and Kazakhstan.

Source: Reuters

## India has plan to explore the Moon beyond Chandrayaan-3

Following the triumphant landing of Chandrayaan-3 near the lunar south pole, India is charting a bold course for its future in lunar exploration. The Indian Space Research Organisation (Isro) has set its sights on a series of more complex and ambitious lunar missions, aiming to eventually send astronauts to the Moon by 2040.

Union Minister of State for Science & Technology, Dr. Jitendra Singh, recently revealed that the roadmap for India's forthcoming moon exploration endeavors is currently being conceptualised. This comprehensive plan includes feasibility studies for further robotic missions involving orbiters, landers, and rovers. These missions are expected to pave the way for advanced objectives such as lunar sample collection and return missions, which will serve as precursors to human landings on the Moon's surface.



## Jeff Bezos sells \$2 billion of Amazon shares in first major stock sale since 2021

Jeff Bezos unloaded 12 million shares of Amazon.com Inc. this week, the first time the billionaire has sold the company's stock since 2021.

The sales took place on Wednesday and Thursday (Feb 7 and 8) and netted just over \$2 billion, according to a filing.

Amazon disclosed on Feb. 2 that Bezos plans to sell as many as 50 million shares of Amazon over the next 12 months, potentially cashing in on a stock surge that's put him within reach of becoming the world's richest person. His fortune has climbed \$22.6 billion this year to \$199.5 billion as of Friday, according to the Bloomberg Billionaires Index.

The Amazon founder has sold over \$30 billion in shares since records going back to 2002, including about \$20 billion combined in 2020 and 2021. He has primarily been gifting stock, including shares worth roughly \$230 million that were given to nonprofit organizations in November.

# Paytm's loss is Airtel's gain? Airtel Payments Bank sees spike in new customers

Airtel Payments Bank has experienced a remarkable surge in new customers applying online for various services, including bank account openings and FASTags, over the past few days, according to its chief executive officer Anubrata Biswas, PTI reported.

While Biswas did not explicitly confirm a direct correlation to users shifting from Paytm Payments Bank following the RBI's action on January 31, he acknowledged the substantial increase in digital product applications.

The RBI directed Paytm Payments Bank to cease accepting deposits or top-ups in customer accounts, wallets, FASTags, and other instruments after February 29. Despite nudges and warnings over some time, persistent non-compliance with regulatory guidelines led to stern action against the fintech. The RBI has clarified that there are no systemic concerns.

Speaking about the performance and operational metrics of Airtel Payments Bank, Biswas said, "All our digital products, be it customers who have an account applying for fixed deposit, be it new customers applying online for bank account or customers applying for FASTag, all are 5-7 times the January rates. This has happened over the last few days."

The online application for digital products, such as savings bank accounts and FASTag products, has grown 5-7 times in the last few days, according to Biswas.

"There seems to be a swelling of uptake on Bank's products for whatever context there may be...", he said.

On the other hand, Paytm Payments Bank is reportedly witnessing a gradual decline in transaction volumes. Customers are uncertain about the future, contributing to the drop in transactions.

However, sources familiar with the matter suggest that there has only been a 10 per cent-15 per cent decline in transaction volumes handled via Paytm Payments Bank so far, reported Reuters.

If the pace doesn't quicken, there is speculation that the central bank may consider extending the deadline, it added.



### Paytm to operate as third-party app for UPI: Report

One97 Communications Limited, the parent firm of crisis-hit Paytm, is focusing on the third-party payment app (TPAP) route to ensure that the fintech major's Unified Payments Interface (UPI) remains available to its users, according to an Economic Times report.

"Since Paytm Payments Bank will stop offering payment services, Paytm will become a third-party app going forward, integrating UPI through other lenders," the reported quoted a person aware of the development, as saying.

Accordingly, One97 Communications Limited has initiated discussions with the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), which runs the UPI ecosystem in the country, the person added.

Currently, people using Paytm for UPI payments, have virtual payment addresses (VPAs) ending in @paytm. After March 1, however, customers might find this VPA changing to some other bank's handle. *Source: HT*

## RBI maintains status quo, keeps key policy rate unchanged

MUMBAI (TIP)

The Reserve Bank of India on Thursday, Feb 8, decided to keep policy rate unchanged for the sixth time in a row as it maintains a tight vigil on inflation.

The rate increase cycle was paused in April last year after six consecutive rate hikes aggregating to 250 basis points since May 2022.

Announcing the bi-monthly monetary policy, RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das on Thursday said the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) has decided to keep the repo rate unchanged at 6.5 per cent.

He said MPC will remain watchful of food inflation so that the benefits gained are not frittered away.

This is the first bi-monthly policy following presentation of Interim Budget 2024-25 last week.

In December, the Consumer Price-based Inflation (CPI) stood at 5.69 per cent.

The government has mandated RBI to ensure CPI inflation at 4 per cent with a margin of 2 per cent on either side.

### Changes announced to electronic trading platforms

On the financial markets front, RBI announced that it will comprehensively review the existing regulatory guidelines for Electronic Trading Platforms (ETPs) that enable transactions in financial instruments regulated by RBI such as foreign exchange and government securities. The review comes in the wake of growing



integration between Indian rupee (INR) markets onshore in India and offshore centers, rapid evolution in trading technologies and infrastructure, as well as increasing diversity of tradable products.

RBI said that financial market participants have also been demanding access to offshore ETPs that offer INR derivative products for effective price discovery and risk management. As part of the revised norms likely to be unveiled after public feedback, Indian banks and traders may get more flexibility in accessing overseas trading venues.

In another move aimed at easing hedging against gold price fluctuations, the central bank has allowed resident entities in India to access overseas derivative platforms both on recognized exchanges as well as over-the-counter (OTC) markets based in International

Financial Services Centre (IFSC). The measure will provide domestic traders and jewelers better ability to hedge their gold exposures through a diverse set of hedging products available globally.

On the regulatory front for banks and lending institutions, RBI has now mandated that all regulated entities must provide a standardized Key Fact Statement (KFS) to retail and MSME borrowers giving key details of the loan agreement including all-in interest cost. This will equip the customers, especially the middle and low-income segments, to make better sense of the loan terms and conditions enabling informed decisions.

Further, the RBI aims to improve safety and security of transactions made under the popular Aadhaar Enabled Payment System (AePS) that allows digital payments to be made against Aadhaar identification. Additional guidelines are expected on strengthening customer onboarding verification process for entities managing AePS touchpoints, as well as incorporating risk management requirements to prevent frauds.

On the digital payments and central bank digital currency (CBDC) front, RBI indicated that it will be adopting a broad principle-based framework for authentication of various types of digital transactions. This is expected to promote adoption of more advanced authentication mechanisms beyond the prevalent SMS-based OTPs.



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# Madame Tussauds New York Unveils Wax Figure of Yoga Guru Baba Ramdev in New Delhi



BY MURTAZA ALI KHAN

In a dazzling event graced by the presence of the eminent yoga guru himself, Baba Ramdev, Madame Tussauds New York revealed the wax sculpture of the globally recognized "Yoga Guru" at The Lalit New Delhi. The wax figure, depicting Baba Ramdev in the classic standing posture known as the 'Tree Pose,' will soon be available for fans to meet and interact with at Madame Tussauds New York.

Baba Ramdev, celebrated as a new-age youth idol for his inspirational approach to yogic practices, has been a driving force behind the promotion of healthy living through Yoga and ancient Ayurvedic treatments. The unveiling of his wax figure is not just a gift to his admirers but also a tribute to the yogi whose influence extends globally.

Madame Tussauds New York spokesperson Tiago Mogodouro expressed delight at the unveiling, stating, "Today, we are delighted to unveil the wax figure of Baba Ramdev. His commitment to society through the promotion of Yoga, introduction of Ayurveda culture, and advocacy for healthy living is truly a gift for us all. This moment is a source of pride for us, having the figure of this charismatic personality displayed in our world-famous Madame Tussauds New York wax attraction."

Mogodouro emphasized that the wax figure is more than a mere representation; it symbolizes the profound impact and global reach of Baba Ramdev's teachings. The figure, a harmonious blend of spiritual wisdom and health,



Madame Tussauds New York revealed the wax sculpture of the globally recognized "Yoga Guru" at The Lalit New Delhi

mirrors the admiration and respect he commands worldwide.

Speaking at the occasion, Yog Rishi Swami Ramdev said, "Today it is a moment of great honor as my wax figure in

'Tree Pose' has been unveiled at Madame Tussauds New York. I consider this as an important recognition of the global influence of Indian culture, especially Yoga and Ayurveda."

Ramdev further explained that the wax figure represents not only his personal journey but also the ancient and spiritual wisdom of India, based on the principles of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' and "Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah, Sarve Santu Niramaya," which embody the ideal of life.

Expressing gratitude to Madame Tussauds for the honor, Baba Ramdev encouraged the continuation of sharing Indian heritage with the world, fostering a healthier and more harmonious global community.

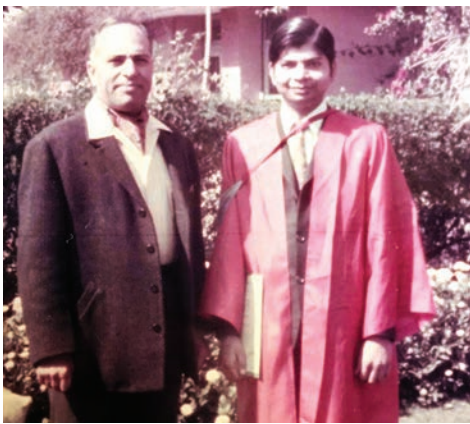
Baba Ramdev, co-founder of Patanjali Ayurveda Ltd, one of India's largest and most prestigious Ayurveda businesses, has played a pivotal role in encapsulating the true essence of Ayurveda, blending ancient wisdom with the latest technology. Madame Tussauds artisans meticulously took over 200 exact measurements and pictures during the figure sitting with Baba Ramdev in London, ensuring a realistic resemblance in the creation of his wax figure.

Emmy-nominated Indian-American filmmaker and a committed Ayurveda promoter Tirlok Malik who was also present at the event extended warm congratulations to Yog Rishi Swami Ramdev, welcoming both the spiritual leader and his wax figure to New York on behalf of the Indian-American community in the US. Swami Ramdev reciprocated Malik's gesture by rejoicing the euphoria which will reach its crescendo when the wax figure makes its arrival in New York.

(Murtaza Ali Khan is an Indian critic, journalist, and cultural writer who has been covering cinema, art and culture for over ten years. He tweets at [murtaza.jmi@gmail.com](https://twitter.com/murtaza.jmi))

## My Guru, Professor Talwar

BY ZAFAR IQBAL, PHD



Dr. Zafar Iqbal with Prof. Talwar

یونانیوں کا اجزاء انہی سے کاموت  
تو تیب ظہور میں عناصر سے کما زندگی

ज़िन्दगी क्या है अनासिर में ज़ुहर-इ तरतीب,  
मौत क्या है इन्ही अज्जा का परेशा होना

*Zindagi kya hai anasir mein zuhur-e  
tarteeb Maut kya hai inhi ajza ka  
pareshan hona*

Life is an arrangement of components in a proper form whereas the disintegration of this arrangement of component is death.

On my first day as a student at the All-

India Institute of Medical Sciences, a reference to a Lakhnavi poet evoking the biology of life kindled a deep sense of pride within me, hailing as I did from Lucknow. This marked the commencement of Professor G. P. Talwar's insightful lectures on biological sciences for the institute's incoming medical students. Through the evocative verses of Urdu poet Pandit Brij Narain Chakbast Lakhnavi, he adeptly navigated the complexities of life and death.

Years later, in 1974, during a visit to Lucknow from the USA, I had the honor of being interviewed at the All-India Radio Station Lucknow by the esteemed Ms. Uma Chakbast, fondly known as Uma didi. Amidst our conversation, she touched upon the status of Urdu in the USA. Intrigued, I ventured to ask her about her potential lineage to the renowned poet Chakbast. Her eyes sparkled with pride as she affirmed her connection to the illustrious poet, her grandfather. I fondly recalled my experience of Professor Talwar's enthralling lecture on life's biology. Later, during a visit to her home, I gratefully received an autographed copy of the book "Subh-e-Watan," a compilation of Chakbast Lakhnavi's works by Uma didi.

Dr. Talwar not only shaped my academic journey but also introduced me to a plethora of extracurricular activities unparalleled in other institutions. We were

enveloped in a rich tapestry of liberal arts and cultural endeavors, enriched further by enlightening lectures from luminaries such as M. F. Hussain, Satish Gujral, and the spiritual sage Mahesh Yogi. Under Dr. Talwar's guidance, I took charge of creating vibrant posters to promote these events.

From a scientific standpoint, our biochemistry department blossomed into a national epicenter for groundbreaking research and strategic planning. Esteemed academicians from diverse regions and returning Pool Officers from international assignments frequently graced our department. While my primary role was to assist with their presentations, I confess to occasionally rearranging slides in jest when the visitors overlooked the decorum expected towards students.

My hostel afforded picturesque views of lush lawns, bustling with joggers in the morning and cricket enthusiasts as the day progressed. An annual spectacle was the cricket clash between the faculty and postgraduate students. A particularly memorable match showcased Professor Talwar's formidable batting skills. To everyone's surprise, I, an inexperienced bowler, was entrusted with the task and remarkably dismissed Professor Talwar in just two deliveries. Though my peers humorously speculated about the potential postponement to my PhD due to this

unexpected triumph, Dr. Talwar's encouraging pat on my back was a moment I cherish to this day.

As time unfurled, Dr. Talwar moved on to establish the National Institute of Immunology, dedicating himself to pioneering research on leprosy and other endemic diseases in India. He subsequently founded the Talwar Foundation, a testament to his commitment to nurturing young researchers and scientists. Dr. Talwar remains an unwavering inspiration, continually pushing the frontiers of scientific inquiry and fostering the next generation of scientific visionaries. In a heartfelt interview on Rajya Sabha TV, he emphasized the importance of resilience, sincerity, and steadfast determination in pursuing one's aspirations.

Among the plethora of accolades celebrating his scientific contributions, the Padma Bhushan Award bestowed upon him by the Government of India holds a special place.

In profound reverence and homage to Professor Raghupati Sahai Firaq Gorakhpuri, I've respectfully adapted one of his couplets to commemorate Dr. Talwar's illustrious legacy.

*aane vaali nasleñ tum par fakhr  
kareñgi ham-asro  
jab bhi un ko dhyaan aa.ega tum ne  
'Talwar' ko dekha hai*

Forthcoming generations will be proud of you, my colleagues, Whenever they would comprehend that you saw Talwar.



BEJAN DARUWALLA AND CHIRAG DARUWALLA

**ARIES**

Ganesha says this week, Aries, you find yourself standing at the precipice of change, ready to leap into the unknown with the full force of your dynamic energy. The stars align to offer you a unique blend of courage and opportunity, making it an ideal time to tackle challenges head-on, especially in your career. Bold initiatives are favored, and your natural leadership qualities will come to the fore, attracting both recognition and success. On the personal front, your relationships demand attention. Engage in heartfelt discussions to strengthen your bonds. Remember, your words have power; use them to heal, not hurt.

**TAURUS**

Ganesha says the week is a gentle reminder to embrace the art of patience and the virtue of self-reflection. Your usual rush to achieve may be tempered by a cosmic call to slow down, urging you to focus inward and contemplate your true desires and needs. Financially, a cautious approach is advised. Avoid impulsive spending and consider long-term investments instead. In matters of the heart, your steadfast nature draws others to you, but it's crucial to communicate openly and ensure your needs are also being met. Cultivate balance between giving and receiving.

**GEMINI**

Ganesha says gemini, this week promises a whirlwind of activity, highlighting your adaptability and thirst for variety. Your social life is particularly vibrant, offering opportunities to connect with like-minded individuals who inspire and challenge you. However, amidst the hustle, don't lose sight of your need for moments of quiet reflection. Professionally, unexpected opportunities may arise; your ability to think on your feet will serve you well. In romantic relationships, clear communication is your pathway to deeper understanding and intimacy. Embrace honesty, and let your true self be seen.

**CANCER**

Ganesha says this week centers on themes of home, family, and emotional security. You may find yourself in the role of caregiver, offering support and comfort to those around you. While nurturing others is second nature to you, remember to also care for yourself. Your

**WEEKLY HOROSCOPE - FEB 12 TO FEB 18, 2024****By Chirag Daruwalla - Son of Astrologer Bejan Daruwalla**

intuition is heightened, guiding you towards decisions that align with your deepest values. Professionally, collaborative efforts are favored. Share your ideas and visions; they have the potential to lead to significant achievements. Emotionally, it's a time for healing. Let go of past hurts and embrace forgiveness.

**LEO**

Ganesha says your creative energy is at an all-time high this week, urging you to express yourself and pursue activities that bring you joy and fulfillment. Your natural charisma draws others to you, making it an excellent time for collaborative creative projects. At work, your leadership skills are in demand. Approach tasks with confidence, but be mindful of your colleagues' contributions. In love, your generosity and warmth are your greatest assets. Show appreciation for your partner, but ensure your own needs are not overlooked. Balance is key.

**VIRGO**

Ganesha says this week calls for a methodical approach to your goals. Your attention to detail and organizational skills are your greatest allies, helping you navigate through complex tasks with ease. Financially, a plan for saving and budgeting will help secure your future. In your personal life, honesty and openness pave the way for meaningful connections. Express your feelings and desires clearly to avoid misunderstandings. Health-wise, prioritize self-care. Your well-being is the foundation upon which your success is built.

**LIBRA**

Ganesha says your focus this week is on finding balance and harmony in all areas of your life. Your innate ability to mediate and seek compromise will be invaluable, especially in resolving any conflicts that arise. Creatively, you're inspired to explore new avenues and express yourself in unique ways. In relationships, your charm and diplomacy enhance your connections, drawing others closer. However, remember to stay true to yourself and maintain your boundaries. Your peace of mind is just as important as pleasing others.

**SCORPIO**

Ganesha says this week invites you to dive deep into your emotions and explore the hidden depths of your psyche. It's a powerful time for introspection and personal transformation. You may find yourself drawn to activities that allow for self-discovery and healing. Professionally, trust your intuition; it will guide you toward decisions that align with your true path. In personal relationships, seek

authenticity and depth. Surface-level interactions no longer satisfy you. Embrace vulnerability; it's the key to genuine connections.

**SAGITTARIUS**

Ganesha says your adventurous spirit is ignited this week, urging you to seek out new experiences and expand your horizons. Whether through travel, learning, or engaging with different cultures, you're encouraged to explore and grow. Professionally, your innovative ideas are well-received, opening doors to exciting opportunities. In matters of the heart, honesty and openness are essential. Share your dreams and aspirations with your loved ones, and invite them to join you on your journey of discovery.

**CAPRICORN**

Ganesha says this week is about discipline, ambition, and the pursuit of your goals. Your dedication and hard work are more pronounced than ever, bringing you closer to achieving your long-term aspirations. Financially, consider investments that offer stability and growth. In your personal life, it's important to connect with those who share your values and support your ambitions. Remember, success is not just about professional achievements but also about creating a life that brings you joy and fulfillment.

**AQUARIUS**

Ganesha says this week encourages you to embrace your individuality and express your unique ideas and visions. The conventional path may not appeal to you now; instead, you're drawn to innovative and unconventional approaches. Socially, you're a magnet for like-minded individuals who appreciate your originality and forward-thinking. In love, seek a partner who respects your need for independence and matches your intellectual curiosity. Celebrate your uniqueness; it's your greatest strength.

**PISCES**

Ganesha says this week focuses on emotional healing, creativity, and connecting with your inner self. Your empathetic nature allows you to form deep and meaningful relationships. Use this time to engage in creative pursuits that nourish your soul and express your innermost feelings. Professionally, trust your intuition to lead you to opportunities that resonate with your personal values. In relationships, seek partners who offer emotional support and understanding. Your sensitivity is a gift; cherish and protect it.



## BIRTHDAY HOROSCOPE : FEBRUARY 12 TO FEBRUARY 18 BY VEDIC ASTROLOGER NASTUR BEJAN DARUWALLA



**VEDIC ASTROLOGER NASTUR  
BEJAN DARUWALLA**

**12 FEB :** Ganesha says you are about to experience a surge of energy that will inspire you to break free from your usual and welcome the new. This is a day in which engaging in creative endeavors and actively seeking out new experiences are not only advantageous but essential to your development. The cosmos is encouraging you to delve into the profundities of your creativity and passion, and it is nudging you in the direction of self-discovery. Put your faith in your gut instinct, since it will guide you down roads that are both unexpected and gratifying. Take a leap of faith and go headfirst into the unknown, let your spirit of adventure shine through, and keep in mind that the trip itself is just as essential as the destination in this instance. It is up to you to make the most of the numerous opportunities that surround you for personal development.

**13 FEB :** Ganesha says the emphasis on human relationships and the emotional ties that bind us throughout the day is a defining characteristic of today. The relationships you have with other people are brought into the forefront, and you are compelled to tend to them with compassion, understanding, and careful consideration. Communication is essential in today's world; it is important to keep an open heart and to listen attentively to the wants, dreams, and needs of those around you. It is the ideal moment to mend old wounds, clear up any misconceptions, and deepen ties with those you care about. Keep in mind that

the love and energy that we invest in our relationships will come back to us in a variety of different ways, enhancing our lives beyond all comprehension.

**14 FEB :** Ganesha says today you are strongly urged to focus your attention within and contemplate the objectives and objectives that you have set for yourself. The day is one for reflection and contemplation; it is an opportunity to reevaluate your course of action and make certain that it is congruent with who you truly are. This day is perfect for creating intentions and building the basis for future accomplishments since the energy of the day encourages in-depth thinking and planning, making it an ideal candidate for these activities. If you are able to, you should make the most of your time alone since it will enable you to hear your inner voice more clearly. Have faith that the realizations you achieve today will serve as a compass to direct you toward achieving significant advancements in your life.

**15 FEB :** Ganesha says if you want to express yourself creatively and share your talents with the world, you should do so today since the energy that is there is energetic and dynamic. You are urged to engage in artistic pursuits, begin new projects, or simply indulge in pastimes that offer you joy on this day, which is a day in which your creative juices are flowing freely. Your creative expression is being supported by the cosmos, which is simultaneously providing you with the confidence to demonstrate your one-of-a-

kind abilities. Embrace this chance to shine and keep in mind that creativity is not just a means of self-expression but also a potent instrument for connecting with others and finding inspiration.

**16 FEB :** Ganesha says the concept of equilibrium and harmony is the topic of discussion today, particularly in relation to one's personal and professional life. This day is a good time to assess your priorities and make any necessary modifications to ensure that you are leading a life that is well-balanced. The energy makes it easier to achieve homeostasis, and it encourages you to look for peace and stability in all aspects of your life. It is possible that it is time to delegate chores, decline extra responsibility, or simply take some time for yourself. Keep in mind that being able to maintain a balance is essential to both your well-being and your productivity.

**17 FEB :** Ganesha says transformation and rebirth are the topics that will be discussed today. You should feel free to let go of any baggage from the past, beliefs that have become obsolete, and anything else that is no longer serving your highest good. Taking some time for introspection and making room for fresh starts is a potent activity to do today. You are provided with the strength to confront your concerns and accept growth as a result of the energy, which enables profound and dramatic transformations. It is important to have faith in the process of renewal because it can lead to significant personal development and

allows for the introduction of new opportunities.

**18 FEB :** Ganesha says you are being reminded to recognize and appreciate the blessings that are present in your life today, which is a day that is all about thankfulness and abundance. Today is a day to enjoy the things that you have accomplished, to acknowledge the love and support that you have received, and to concentrate on the positive aspects of your life. You will have sentiments of contentment and joy that are enhanced by the spirit of the day, which will encourage you to spread positivity and kindness. seize a minute to reflect on your blessings and share your plenty with others. Keep in mind that a grateful heart attracts more of what it appreciates, so make sure you seize this opportunity.

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# Sikh History This Week

## FEBRUARY 9 TO FEBRUARY 15

### 9th February



1924 1st Shaheedhi Jatha of 500 Akali Sikhs, under the command of Jathedar Udham Singh of village Verpal, marched from Sri Akal Takhat for Gangsar, Jaito. It reached Jaito on Feb 20-21, the third anniversary of Nankana tragedy

1992 Expressing their desire to live free of India, Sikhs overwhelmingly boycotted elections under the Indian constitution. Despite efforts by government troops to force Sikhs to vote at gunpoint, less than 3.4 percent of the Sikhs in villages voted.

### 10th February



1760 Baba Deep Singh having learned of denegration of Harmandir Sahib and Amritsar sarowar at the hands of Jahankhan. performed ardas for his shahadat.

The Khalsa forces fought British forces in the battle of Sabhraon. It is during this battle that the brave Khalsa General, Sardar Sham Singh of Attari, fell fighting and accepted shahadat. During this war, the Khalsa forces suffered heavy losses, mainly due to internal dissension. The Sikh army deprived of ammunition and rations, crossed Sutlej at Sobraon. British made three attacks and were repulsed. Lal Singh and Tej Singh ran away from the battle field as planned with the British. Gulab Singh came and started negotiations with the British to the detriment of Sikh interests. Lal Singh cut off the boat bridge so that Sikh army could neither get any reinforcement nor could retreat back. Under such circumstances the British won and the Sikhs lost. The Sikh army stood defeated and thus came the most inglorious end of a most glorious army of the Khalsa. This was the last battle between the British and the Sikhs.

1923 Bishan Singh Zaildar of Rani Thua killed.

### 11th February

1393 Birthday of Bhagat Ravidas. A Study of Bhakata Ravidas", by Darshan Singh, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1981. concludes that Ravidas lived



between 1393-1528.

1713 Farukhsyar became ruler of Delhi. He immediately sent a mammoth army against the Sikhs. The Sikhs resisted for about six months until they ran short of food supplies. In October 1713, the Sikhs retreated to the hills. 1820 Kanwar Nauhil Singh, grand son of Sher-I-Punjab Maharaja Ranjit Singh, was born.

1861 Maharani Jind Kaur caught with her beloved son, Maharaja Dalip Singh, and met in Calcutta.



### 12th February



1764 Foundation was laid for a permanent fort at Patiala.

### 13th February

1870: Baba Darbara Singh of the Nirankari movement, passed away. He was second to Baba Dayal Singh, founder of the Nirankari movement.

1923: A police informer, Diwan, is murdered by the



Babbar Akalis.

1987: Feb. 13-15, an Academic Conference on Sikh Scholarship was organized under the auspices of the University of Toronto. This was the first conference of its kind after the assault on Golden Temple. Many renowned scholars from United Kingdom, India, United States, and Canada participated in this conference. Papers were presented on selected topics on Religion and Culture; History and Politics: India; History and Society; Diaspora; and Comments on recent Events.

### 14th February

1983: 11 Sikhs killed in a strike observed by the Hindus of Punjab.

### 15th February



1605 Guru Hargobind married Mata Damodari, daughter of Narian Das, a Julka Khatri of the village of Dall, 6 Kilometers southeast of Sultanpur Lodhi in Kapurthala district of the Punjab. This marriage resulted in a son, Baba Gurditta born in 1613 and a daughter, Bibi Viro born in 1615.

1762 Ahmad Shah Abdali traveled from Sirhind to Lahore with 50 bullock-carts filled with heads of Sikh.

1809 The East India Company established a cantonment in Ludhiana. This cantonment was specifically established to check the advance of Khalsa forces beyond the Sutlej.

1984 Feb. 15-20, the Hindus of Haryana under the guidance of the Chief Minister Bhajan Lal and senior police officials, attacked innocent Sikhs in the cities of Panipat, Rohtak, Kaithal Karnal, Ambala, Jind and other parts of Haryana province and killed 20 Sikhs, burnt six Sikh shrines and looted 200 Sikh houses and shops. The hair and beards of more than 12 Sikhs were shaved off by the Hindus in the presence of heavy contingents of police and Central Reserve Police CRP.

# Basant Panchami

The Indian festival of Basant Panchami, also known as Saraswati Puja, marks the beginning of the spring festival. The festival typically takes place between the end of January and the beginning of February. This year, Basant Panchami falls on Wednesday, February 14.

According to legend, Kalidasa had intended to commit suicide by drowning himself in a river after learning that his wife had been abandoned. Goddess Saraswati asked Kalidasa to take a bath in the water as she emerged from the water just as he was about to do that. After that, his life changed as he was endowed with wisdom and rose to become a great poet.

According to mythology, Kamadeva once interrupted Lord Shiva's meditation while he was immersed in it after the death of his wife Sati. This story is based on the Hindu god of love Kama. So that Shiva could re-establish contact with the outside world and become aware of Maa Parvati's efforts on his behalf, seers approached Kama to rouse him from his meditation.

Kama agreed and used his sugarcane bow to launch arrows at Shiva which was made of flowers and bees. Kama was reduced to ashes by Lord Shiva after opening his third eye in rage. After Rati (his wife) completed her 40-day penance, Shiva agreed to resurrect him on Basant Panchami. He allegedly later gave birth to the son of Lord Krishna named Pradumna.

## BIRTHDAY OF GODDESS SARASWATI

Basant Panchami is also denoted as Saraswati Puja by the Hindus in India. It is believed that on this day, Goddess Saraswati, the goddess of art, crafts and knowledge was born. She conferred upon humanity the greatest wealth that a human being can ever ask for, the gift of Knowledge. The Hindu mythology popularizes Goddess Saraswati as the immaculate power who bestows upon the worthy with the wealth of knowledge. The color white is associated with the goddess of knowledge as it is the symbol of peace and serenity. Images of goddess Saraswati with white adornments, sitting on a white lotus flower which blooms in a wide stretch of water are quite commonly seen on this day. Goddess Saraswati or Maa Saraswati, as called by the people of West Bengal, is worshipped on this auspicious day by the worshippers who are themselves clad in the color yellow, the color of spring. Prasad is offered to the goddess and later the same is distributed among the worshippers. The popular festival is related to the goddess of knowledge; hence, children are initiated towards learning and gaining knowledge.

This is significant because it is the birth day of goddess Saraswati. As the river Saraswati is associated with the goddess, rituals are performed on the banks of this holy river. Offerings are made but no sacrifices are conducted. Vegetarian food is cooked and had on this day and people abstain from non-vegetarian food. Goddess Saraswati is supposed to be the goddess of art, literature and speech too; hence, hymns are written and sung in praise of the goddess on Basant Panchami. Whenever a new teaching institution is started, goddess Saraswati is worshipped.

A school is considered to be the temple of learning and hence, a temple of the goddess itself. Schools and colleges organize special functions and cultural activities on this particular day and devote these to goddess Saraswati. Students offer a lot of flowers to the image of Saraswati. They keep all their study materials like books, articles, instruments of music and arts, earthen inkpots and bamboo quills in front of the deity. No one reads anything on this day; it is a way to show their reverence to the deity of knowledge. Most Hindu communities celebrate this festival with great pomp and show as this is the time of the year when goddess Saraswati is remembered by its followers.

## SIGNIFICANCE

This day falls on the fifth day of the Hindu month of Magh, which is also the first day of spring. Goddess Saraswati denotes serenity and calmness. She is generally shown seated on a white lotus, wearing a pure white silk sari and holding a book in her lower left hand. The eyes of the goddess are full of compassion. Her four hands denote four facets of human personality namely mind, intellect,



alertness and ego. The lotus on her hand symbolizes true knowledge. Her ride is a white swan which is known for its peculiar capability of separating water from the milk. The swan indicates that we should have the ability to discriminate the bad from the good.

Basant Panchami, also known as the Saraswati Day, is celebrated by the Hindus across the world with great enthusiasm and festivities. The devotees visit temples which are filled with various types of religious activities. Yellow color is given prominence on this day and people dress up in yellow garments and perform rituals. Yellow represents spiritual knowledge, increasing the significance of the festival. People eat yellow sweets and distribute the same among friends and relatives. People feed Brahmans on this occasion and also perform Pitra-Tarpan, the traditional ancestral worship.

Basant Panchami is the day when children are taught their first words, making it an auspicious occasion which marks the beginning of their learning process. On this day, schools and colleges organize special worships for goddess Saraswati. Traditionally children place their books on the altar, at the goddess's feet. No one is allowed to touch the books during this period as they believe that goddess Saraswati is blessing the books. Devotees believe that worshipping of goddess Saraswati will lead to spiritual enlightenment. It is generally said that there is no comparison between a king and a learned person as the king is honored only in his land but a learned person is respected everywhere.

Saintly and learned people who are inclined towards spirituality know the importance of worshipping goddess Saraswati. Other activities performed on this day include worshipping of Kamadeva, the God of Love. On this occasion, people offers prayers to the Sun God and the deities associated with Ganges. The festivities of Basant

**“Everyone thinks how to become a better son or daughter, mother or father, brother or sister, husband or wife, and man or woman. But no one puts actual thoughts on that they are all HUMAN and how to become a better HUMAN. What can we do to learn how to be a better human? ”**

**-- Arish K Sahani**

Panchami include kite flying and a kite festival is observed in Ferozepur, Punjab. Basant Panchami marks the arrival of spring and can be noted from the colored blooms in trees and crops. This is the period when mango flowers start blossoming on trees, representing the beginning of a new life. Basant Panchami spiritually signifies that the days of ignorance and gloom are over and the period of joy and spiritual awakening has begun.

## Kite Festival

The festival of Basant Panchami is celebrated to welcome the season of spring, a season when the earth replenishes itself. Spring also denotes pleasant weather, during which calm wind whistles in your ear and caresses your face with its light cool touch. It is the season when the weather is neither hot nor cold, when the wind has a cooling effect but not the kind to chill your bones. This kind of weather reminds you of a number of things including Basant Panchami, the primary festival of this season. It is one of the most colorful and wonderful festivals of this effervescent nation and is celebrated on the fifth day of the Indian month of Magh. The festival brings in a number of colors in the form of colorful attires.

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**“If Hindus don't maintain Hinduism, who shall save it?”**

**“If India's own children don't cling to their faith, who shall guard it?”**

**“Indians alone can save India, and India and Hinduism are one.”**

# History This Week

## FEBRUARY 09 - FEBRUARY 15

### FEBRUARY 9

February 9, 1943 - During World War II in the Pacific, U.S. troops captured Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands after six months of battle, with 9,000 Japanese and 2,000 Americans killed.



Birthdays - William Henry Harrison (1773-1841) the 9th U.S. President was born in Berkeley, Virginia. He took office on March 4, 1841 and died only 32 days later after developing pneumonia from the cold weather during his inaugural ceremonies.

### FEBRUARY 10



February 10, 1942 - The first Medal of Honor during World War II was awarded to 2nd Lt. Alexander Nininger (posthumously) for heroism during the Battle of Bataan.

February 10, 1967 - The 25th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was ratified, clarifying the procedures for presidential succession in the event of the disability of a sitting president.

### FEBRUARY 11

February 11th - Celebrated in Japan as the founding date of the Japanese nation, which occurred with the accession to the throne of the first Emperor, Jimmu, in 660 BC.



February 11, 1929 - Italian dictator Benito Mussolini granted political independence to Vatican City and

recognized the sovereignty of the Pope (Holy See) over the area, measuring about 110 acres.

February 11, 1990 - In South Africa, Nelson Mandela, at age 71, was released from prison after serving 27 years of a life sentence on charges of attempting to overthrow the apartheid government. In April 1994, he was elected president in the first all-race elections.



February 11, 2011 - In Egypt, President Hosni Mubarak resigned amid a massive protest calling for his ouster. Thousands of young Egyptians and others had protested non-stop for 18 days in Cairo, Alexandria and elsewhere. Mubarak had ruled Egypt for nearly 30 years, functioning as a virtual dictator.

Birthdays - American inventor Thomas Edison (1847-1931) was born in Milan, Ohio. Throughout his lifetime he acquired over 1,200 patents including the incandescent bulb, phonograph and movie camera. Best known for his quote, "Genius is one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration."

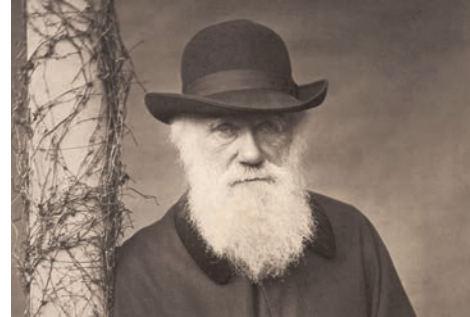
### FEBRUARY 12



February 12, 1999 - The impeachment trial of President Bill Clinton in the U.S. Senate ended. With the whole world watching via television, Senators stood up one by one during the final roll call to vote "guilty" or "not guilty." On Article 1 (charging Clinton with perjury) 55 senators, including 10 Republicans and all 45 Democrats voted not guilty. On Article 2 (charging Clinton with obstruction of justice) the Senate split evenly, 50 for and 50 against the President. With the necessary two-thirds majority not having been achieved, President Clinton was thus acquitted on both charges and served out the remainder of his term of office lasting through January 20, 2001.

Birthdays - Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865) the 16th U.S. President was born in Hardin County, Kentucky. He led the nation through the tumultuous Civil

War, freed the slaves, composed the Gettysburg Address, and established Thanksgiving.



Birthdays - Author and naturalist Charles Darwin (1809-1882) was born in Shrewsbury, England. Best known for his work Origin of the Species concerning the theory of evolution.

### FEBRUARY 13



February 13, 1635 - Boston Latin School, the first tax-payer supported (public) school in America was established in Boston, Massachusetts.

February 13, 1945 - During World War II in Europe, British and American planes began massive bombing raids on Dresden, Germany. A four-day firestorm erupted that was visible for 200 miles and engulfed the historic old city, killing an estimated 135,000 German civilians.

Birthdays - American artist Grant Wood (1892-1942) was born near Anamosa, Iowa. Best known for his painting American Gothic featuring a farm couple.

### FEBRUARY 14



February 14th - Celebrated as (Saint) Valentine's Day around the world, now one of the most widely observed unofficial holidays in which romantic greeting cards and gifts are exchanged.

February 14, 1849 - Photographer Mathew Brady took the first photograph of a U.S. President in office, James Polk.

February 14, 1929 - The St. Valentine's Day massacre occurred in Chicago as seven members of the Bugs Moran gang were gunned down by five of Al Capone's mobsters posing as police.

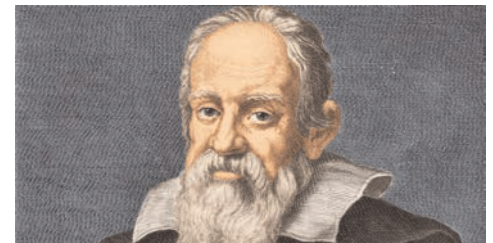
### FEBRUARY 15



February 15, 1898 - In Havana, the U.S. Battleship Maine was blown up while at anchor and quickly sank with 260 crew members lost. The incident inflamed public opinion in the U.S., resulting in a declaration of war against Spain on April 25, 1898, amid cries of "Remember the Maine!"

February 15, 1933 - An assassination attempt on newly elected U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt occurred in Miami, Florida. A spectator deflected the gunman's aim. As a result, Chicago Mayor Anton Cermak was shot and killed instead. The gunman, an Italian immigrant, was captured and later sentenced to death.

February 15, 1989 - Soviet Russia completed its military withdrawal from Afghanistan after nine years of unsuccessful involvement in the civil war between Muslim rebel groups and the Russian-backed Afghan government. Over 15,000 Russian soldiers had been killed in the fighting.



Birthdays - Astronomer and physicist Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) was born in Pisa, Italy. He was the first astronomer to use a telescope and advanced the theory that the sun, not the earth, was the center of the solar system.

Birthdays - Inventor Cyrus McCormick (1809-1884) was born in Rockbridge County, Virginia. He invented the horse-drawn mechanical reaper, a machine that freed farmers from hard labor and contributed to the development and cultivation of vast areas of the American Great Plains.



Birthdays - Susan B. Anthony (1820-1906) was born in Adams, Massachusetts. A pioneer in women's rights, she worked tirelessly for woman's suffrage (right to vote) and in 1872 was arrested after voting (illegally) in the presidential election. She was commemorated in 1979 with the Susan B. Anthony dollar coin, thus became the first American woman to have her image on a U.S. coin.

# Kodaikanal: The Princess of hill stations

Located in the state of Tamil Nadu, Kodaikanal is one of the most famous honeymoon destinations in India. A Lakeside resort town of Tamil Nadu, Kodaikanal has a beautiful climate, mist-covered manicured cliffs and waterfall that come together to create the ideal setting for a perfect getaway. Kodaikanal means 'the gift of the forests'.

Nestled amidst the rolling slopes of the Palani Hills, Kodaikanal stands at an altitude of 7200 feet above sea level, and once you visit this hill station, you will find that every bit of what you have imagined it to be is real. Kodaikanal is a place you can go to take a break from the rigours of daily city life, and this hill station lets you sit back and connect with nature as you head out on biking or trekking trails or take a stroll through the vast forests surrounding the town.

## Green Valley View

Formerly known as Suicide point, the Green Valley View offers a breathtaking view of the plains, deep valleys and hills. The mesmerizing view of the Vaigai Dam is an unforgettable experience. It used to be known as suicide point because of the dangerous valley which is dense and deep; below the point of more than 5000 feet drop.

Located at a distance of 5.5 km from the Kodaikanal Lake, the Green Valley View not just offers a gorgeous view, but is also surrounded by a lot of monkeys. On the way to the point, there are several shops which offer homemade chocolates, ornaments and a wide range of flowers.

## Kodaikanal Lake

Kodaikanal Lake is a manmade lake in the Kodaikanal city which is also known as Kodai Lake. Vera Levinge was the man responsible for the creativity and resources of this lake amidst Kodaikanal town.

The star-shaped lake is centrally located in Kodaikanal and is surrounded by the rich green Palani Hills Range the main watershed for the lake. The lake is situated at an elevation of 2285m above sea level and has an average depth of 3.0m. The lake is at a distance of 3 km from the Kodai Bus stand.

## Bear Shola Falls

Located at a mere distance of 2 kilometres from the Kodaikanal Lake, the Bear Shola Falls is a popular picnic spot in the region. This cascade is a seasonal attraction that comes to life in its fullest during the monsoons. An interesting legend behind the unique name of this place is that it was a favourite haunt of a bear who used to frequent this water body to drink water, hence imparting it the name Bear Shola Falls.

Wrapped with dense forests coupled with the chirping of birds, Bear Shola Falls is a little heaven. Also, the forest area of the Western Ghats situated near the falls is a biodiversity hotspot where you can have a rendezvous with animals like monkeys and deer in the wild.

The terrain around the Bear Shola Falls is slanting and uninterrupted by commercialisation, which makes it the perfect destination to go on a trekking



adventure. As you approach the falls, you will encounter the hill path where you can reach by means of a motored vehicle. From there on, a concrete path leads the way to a short trek of around a kilometre which runs deep in the woods.

## Dolphin's Nose, Kodaikanal

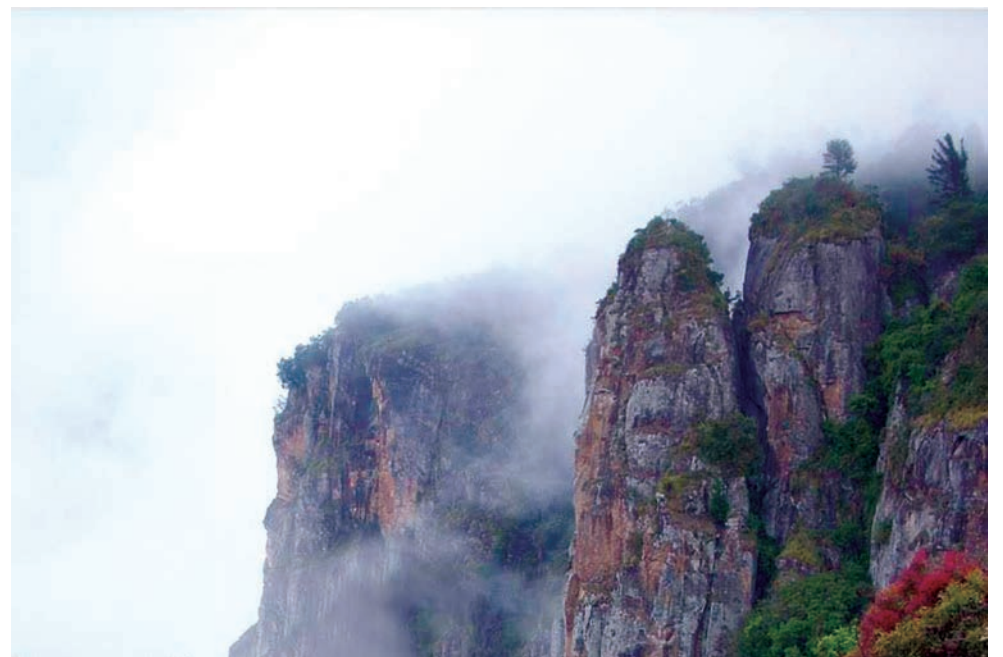
The Dolphin's Nose viewpoint in Kodaikanal is based on a flat, protruding piece of rock that is shaped like a dolphin's nose. This forms a visible cliff at the height of 6,600 feet, where you can experience Kodaikanal at its best - plunging valleys, rugged terrain, clear skies, and the splendor of green.

Reaching this spot requires a moderate level 3 km long trek through the pines and rocks of the Palani Hill Range. It is possible to explore a nearby waterfall and a local village along the way.

## Pillar Rocks

Situated in the 'Princess of Hill stations', Kodaikanal, the Pillar Rocks have become a lovely picnic spot. Constituting a beautiful mini garden; the place is named so as it has three vertically positioned boulders reaching up to a height of 400 feet. The aura here is full of affection and is evidence of a great love story. The 'white cross' which once existed on these rocks represented David Gell's excellent tribute to love. The view of rocks is not something to be missed. They stand as an untouched miracle for the tourists visiting Kodaikanal.

The pillars are famous for providing the bird's view of nearby surroundings. The chambers between these two massive rocks are called the Devil's Kitchen.



Fewer times you might find rocks covered with mist and clouds, but when the ways become clear nothing beautiful than this could be ever seen. Jutting straight away from the hills that surround them, the pillar rocks are majestic. You can come here, sit and relax as you soothe your eyes over the high hill ranges and clear skies. Moreover, do not forget taste the potato and onion bhaji which is served outside the mini garden.

## Thalaiyar Falls

Also known as Rat Tail Falls, Thalaiyar Falls is located in the lush green slopes of Palani Hill ranges in the Dindigul District, in Kodaikanal. With a height of 297m, it is the highest waterfall in Tamil Nadu, the sixth

highest waterfall in India. There is a view tower in the park at the Dum Dum Rock, from where you can get a beautiful view of the falls and the Manjalar Dam. There is a hiking route near the waterfall.

The river water coming to the falls is from Perumal Malai village, through a 9 km downstream and is said to be clear. On the contrary, it may be polluted, and hence, visitors to the area are advised to avoid drinking it.

On a bright day, the falls is visible from the Dum Dum Rock viewpoint on the Batalugundu-Kodaikanal Ghat Road; where it appears like a white long and narrow strip of water on a background of the black rock cliff face. According to legends, Lord Muruga used to visit this rock on his way to the Palani Hills.

CONTD FROM PAGE 1

## 17th Lok Sabha propelled the country towards big changes, says PM Modi on last day of Lok Sabha

essential aspect of democracy and "we will accept proudly".

He referred to the resolution on the Ram Temple in Ayodhya passed by the Lok Sabha, stating that the move would give "constitutional power to the generations to come to be proud of our values".

He added that "for generations, people had dreamt of one Constitution but this House made that possible by removing Article 370".

"These five years have been of reform, perform, and transform. It is rare that we reform, perform, and also see transformation. The country will keep blessing the 17th Lok Sabha," he said.

The Prime Minister thanked MPs and Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla. "You [Mr. Birla] always had a smile on your face no matter what happens. You led this House in an impartial manner and I laud you for it. There were times of anger and accusations but you handled these situations with patience and ran the House wisely," Prime Minister Modi said, hailing Mr. Birla.

Referring to the COVID pandemic, Mr. Modi said that during the last five years, the "biggest crisis of the century" was seen, and Mr. Birla made arrangements so that parliamentary work was not hampered while ensuring the dignity of the House.

"There used to be talk of the need for having a new building in earlier times but the decision of the Speaker made this a reality during the 17th Lok Sabha," he said, adding that the ceremonial installation of the "sengol" (scepter) in the House was also made under Mr. Birla's leadership.

He said the 17th Lok Sabha saw 97% productivity. "We are moving towards the end of the 17th Lok Sabha and we resolve that the productivity should go beyond 100% in the 18th Lok Sabha," Mr. Modi said.

He also hailed the passage of the Women's Reservation Bill and the criminalization of instant triple talaq. (With inputs from The Hindu)

## 'My memory is fine': Joe Biden hits back at special counsel over 'hazy' and 'poor' age jibe

hoarding classified records at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida. Despite abundant differences between the cases, Trump immediately seized on the special counsel report to portray himself as a victim of a "two-tiered system of justice."

Yet even as Hur found evidence that Biden willfully held onto and shared with a ghostwriter highly classified information, the special counsel devoted much of his report to explaining why he did not believe the evidence met the standard for criminal charges, including a high probability that the Justice

Department would not be able to prove Biden's intent beyond a reasonable doubt, citing among other things an advanced age that they said made him forgetful and the possibility of "innocent explanations" for the records that they could not refute.

In remarks at the White House, Biden denied Hur's assertion that he shared classified information, saying, "I did not share classified information. I did not share it with my ghostwriter." He also angrily lashed out at the special counsel for questioning his recollection of his late son Beau's death from cancer.

"How in the hell dare he raise that?" Biden asked, saying he didn't believe it was any of Hur's business.

And in response to Hur's portrayal of him, Biden insisted to reporters that "My memory is fine," and said he believes he remains the most qualified person to serve as president.

Biden's lawyers blasted the report for what they said were inaccuracies and gratuitous swipes at the president. In a statement, Biden said he was "pleased" Hur had "reached the conclusion I believed all along they would reach - that there would be no charges brought in this case and the matter is now closed." He pointedly noted that he had sat for five hours of in-person interviews in the immediate aftermath of Hamas's October attack on Israel, when "I was in the middle of handling an international crisis."

"I just believed that's what I owed the American people so they could know no charges would be brought and the matter closed," Biden said.

The investigation into Biden is separate from special counsel Jack Smith's inquiry into the handling of classified documents by Trump after Trump left the White House. Smith's team has charged Trump with illegally retaining top secret records at his Mar-a-Lago home and then obstructing government efforts to get them back. Trump has said he did nothing wrong.

Hur, a former US Attorney in the Trump administration, was appointed by Attorney General Merrick Garland as special counsel in January 2023 following an initial discovery by Biden staff of classified records in Washington office space. Subsequent property searches by the FBI, all coordinated voluntarily by Biden staff, that turned up additional sensitive documents from his time as vice president and senator.

Hur's report said many of the documents recovered at the Penn Biden Center in Washington, in parts of Biden's Delaware home and in his Senate papers at the University of Delaware were retained by "mistake." Biden could not have been prosecuted as a sitting president, but Hur's report states that he would not recommend charges against Biden regardless.

"We would reach the same conclusion even if Department of Justice policy did not foreclose criminal charges against a sitting president," the report said.

But investigators did find evidence of willful retention and disclosure of a subset of records found in Biden's Wilmington, Delaware house, including in a garage, office and basement den. The files pertain to a troop surge in Afghanistan during the Obama



administration that Biden had vigorously opposed. He kept records that documented his position, including a classified letter to Obama during the 2009 Thanksgiving holiday.

Documents found in a box in Biden's Delaware garage have classification markings up to the Top Secret/Sensitive Compartmented Information Level and "other materials of great significance to him and that he appears to have personally used and accessed." Hur, though, wrote that there was a "shortage of evidence" to prove that Biden placed the documents in the box and knew they were there.

Some of the classified information related to Afghanistan was shared with a ghostwriter with whom he published memoirs in 2007 and 2017. As part of the probe, investigators reviewed a recording of a February 2017 conversation between Biden and his ghostwriter in which Biden can be heard saying that he had "just found all the classified stuff downstairs." AP

## Donald Trump wins Nevada, Virgin Islands caucuses

election rematch with US President Joe Biden in November.

Trump, the frontrunner in his party's nominating race, was the only major candidate competing in Nevada's caucuses and was set to win the state's 26 delegates to the party's nominating convention in July after being projected the winner on Thursday night by Edison Research. Trump also easily won the US Virgin Islands caucuses.

Meanwhile, Nikki Haley has said the US will have a female president in 2024, and it will be either her or Kamala Harris, both of them Indian-origin.

Haley has said she will stay in the race for the White House even after the embarrassment in Nevada and with polling showing her trailing badly in her home state of South Carolina.

(Agencies)

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## Lionel Messi Hong Kong game backlash forces Hangzhou to cancel Argentina vs Nigeria friendly

In a recent turn of events, Chinese sports officials have made the decision to call off the upcoming friendly football match between Argentina and Nigeria. This decision comes in the wake of significant backlash stemming from Lionel Messi's absence during an Inter Miami game in Hong Kong.

Despite being scheduled to play in Hangzhou, followed by a game against Ivory Coast in Beijing, the fallout from Messi not participating in the Hong Kong match has led to the cancellation of the first fixture.

The situation escalated when Messi, who had been expected to play, remained sidelined due to an injury during the Hong Kong event, much to the dismay of fans—some of whom had paid substantial amounts for tickets.

In response to the uproar, the organizers offered a 50% refund to ticket holders. However, the situation was exacerbated when Messi appeared on the field in a subsequent match in Japan, which intensified the backlash.

Messi played a cameo against Vissel Kobe in a 0-0 draw and didn't take part in the penalty shootout.

As a result, Hangzhou's sports authorities announced that the friendly match with Nigeria would not proceed as planned.

"As a commercial event, a company and the Argentinean soccer team negotiated that the team would play a friendly match in March this year in the city of Hangzhou," the Hangzhou authorities said in a statement.

"In view of the current well-known reasons, according to the competent authorities, conditions to hold the friendly match are not mature, therefore (we) have decided to cancel it."

There has been no confirmation regarding the status of the subsequent match against Ivory Coast in Beijing. Requests for comments from both the Chinese FA and the Argentine FA have gone unanswered.

# After Kohli no-show, India hamstrung by Iyer's injury

NEW DELHI (TIP)

Shreyas Iyer is unlikely to be picked in the India squad for the remaining three Tests against England after complaining of stiffness in his back and groin.

Iyer has had recurring troubles with his back and had also undergone a surgery last year.

The 29-year-old made 35, 13, 27, 29 in the first two Tests in Hyderabad and Visakhapatnam and was guilty of not building on the starts.

"He has complained of stiffness and back issue and is unlikely to take part in the remainder of the series," a BCCI source said.

India are already reeling with injuries to key players KL Rahul and Ravindra Jadeja. Star batter Virat Kohli had missed the first two Tests due to personal reasons and is unlikely to be available for the games in Rajkot and Ranchi as well.

The selectors are yet to announce the squad for the last three Tests and will do that after getting clarity over Jadeja's fitness.

The all-rounder will need to pass the fitness test conducted at the National Cricket Academy in Bengaluru. He had missed the Vizag Test due to a hamstring injury, while Rahul complained of quadriceps pain.

Even if both Jadeja and Rahul come back into the playing XI, Iyer's injury could give another opportunity to Rajat Patidar, who could not make a big impact during



Shreyas Iyer has complained of stiffness in his back and groin. PTI

his Test debut in Vizag.

India will assemble in Rajkot on February 11 and England are expected to reach there a day after.

### Virat Kohli informs BCCI he won't play entire India vs England series

Bringing an end to all the speculations, Virat Kohli has reportedly informed the BCCI officials, the selection committee and the Indian team management about his withdrawal from the remaining three Tests against England due to personal reasons. Kohli had missed the first two Tests in Hyderabad and Visakhapatnam due to the same reason. It was earlier reported Kohli, set to be out of action from the third and fourth

Tests, was yet to get in touch with the BCCI officials but on Friday, he informed the selectors about his unavailability, reported The Indian Express.

Kohli had taken part in India's first training session before the series opener in Hyderabad but on the same day, he informed captain Rohit Sharma, head coach Rahul Dravid and the selectors about his decision to opt out of the first two Tests. The next day, the BCCI issued a lengthy press release requesting privacy for the former India captain. BCCI secretary Jay Shah also added that the board, the selectors and the team management respect Kohli's decision and are ready to extend all support.

## FIH HOCKEY PRO LEAGUE

# Eyes on youngsters as Craig Fulton looks to finalise India's Olympic Games squad in Odisha

The dossiers are getting thicker. And training drills are being designed basis that. As much time is spent indoors – in the meeting rooms of hotels, stadiums, and training centers, plotting the downfall of every opponent – as the minutes spent on the field, where the plans will be put into motion.

Every move will be analysed and each match will be an audition. "It's test matches now. Home stretch," says coach Craig Fulton. "We are looking to confirm our Olympic squad."

With that, the South African laid down the marker for India's hockey players. Over the next fortnight, the eight games that India play against the Netherlands, Australia, Spain, and Ireland in the FIH Pro League in Odisha will, in essence, be the selection trials for the Paris Olympics squad.

The matches later this year, Fulton adds, will be used to build the bench strength so that 'if there are injuries



One of the players to watch out for from this group will be the tall forward Hundal. (Hockey India)

then we have depth.'

This gives the Pro League matches, otherwise seen as glorified exhibition games, an edge. And for the players who have been on the periphery of the national team, a final chance to impress the coach.

Especially the quartet that has made the progression

from juniors to senior side in the last couple of years.

### Chance for youngsters

Drag-flicker Sanjay, midfielders Vishnukant Singh and Rabichandra Moirangthem, and forward Arajjeet Hundal have been seen as good enough to be included in a bloated 24-man squad for the matches in Bhubaneswar and Rourkela. The next two weeks will determine if all or any of them have taken enough strides to displace some of the established names, Olympic medallists no less, for a place on the Paris-bound flight.

Each one has something unique to offer.

With drag-flicker and defender Varun Kumar out of the squad for the Pro League after he was accused of rape, Sanjay – who has featured consistently in Fulton's sides including the Asian Games – has a chance to cement his spot.

Source: The Indian Express



## An Eye Institute in Rajahmundry, Andhra Pradesh combatting avoidable blindness in children.

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**Peter J McDonnell, MD Director Wilmer Eye Institute, Johns Hopkins**



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In 2018 Prasanth, Sushanth and Nisanth were diagnosed and treated for Prematurity Retinopathy. An illness in premature babies which can cause blindness.

Luckily through GEMROP an initiative funded by EFA to screen premature babies throughout hospitals in India, the triplets were able to receive an expensive surgery free of charge. The boys are now the age of 4 with perfect vision.