



:- NOTICE :-  
HAPPY VAISAKHI

The INDIAN PANORAMA  
Will bring out a profusely illustrated special edition to mark Vaisakhi- the Harvest Festival of Punjab and the Birth of the Khalsa (the Sikhs) on April 11, 2025.  
Articles and advertisements may please be emailed to salujaindra@gmail.com by April 2, 2025.  
For any questions, please call +1 646-247-9458, or email to editor@theindianpanorama.news

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U.S. Justice Department sting sings Hyderabad-based manufacturer of Fentanyl intermediary



Fentanyl tablet Photo-representational purposes only  
March 27, 2025  
NEW YORK (TIP): The DOJ indictment cited how 25 kg of a chemical known as N-BOC-4P or tert-Butyl 4-oxopiperidine-1-carboxylate was shipped from India to New York City after the undercover federal agent of Homeland Security Investigations wired \$3,125 or \$125 per kg in March  
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Russia's Putin says North Korea, BRICS should join Ukraine ceasefire talks

THE RUSSIAN PRESIDENT SUGGESTS UKRAINE BE PLACED UNDER 'TEMPORARY ADMINISTRATION' OF THE UNITED NATIONS AS PART OF A PEACE DEAL.



Russian President Vladimir Putin, left, and North Korea's leader, Kim Jong Un, smile together in Pyongyang, North Korea, on June 19, 2024  
File photo: Gavriil Grigorov/Sputnik/Kremlin

MARCH 27, 2025  
MOSCOW (TIP): Russian President Vladimir Putin said that Ukraine could be placed under a "temporary administration" as part of a peace process that could include help from North Korea and other Moscow allies, according to Russian state media.  
Speaking to a group of servicemen in Russia's northern port of Murmansk, Putin laid out several provisions for a peace process to end the three-year war launched by Moscow in February 2022, according to Russia's state news agency, TASS.  
Among Putin's many suggestions was a call for new elections in Ukraine and the "signing of key accords" once the country is under international administration, TASS said. "In principle, of course, a temporary administration could be introduced in  
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Senate Confirms Jay Bhattacharya as NIH Chief



Jay Bhattacharya, nominee for director of National Institutes of Health, testifies during a confirmation hearing on Capitol Hill in Washington on March 5, 2025.

MARCH 25, 2025  
WASHINGTON, D.C. (TIP): Dr. Jay Bhattacharya, who was an outspoken critic of measures implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic, gained Senate confirmation to head the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in a vote of 53-47 on March 25.  
Bhattacharya is aligned on multiple issues with his new boss, Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., including addressing the nation's chronic disease epidemic.  
A physician and former Stanford University professor, Bhattacharya first drew public attention in 2020 for his criticism of COVID-19-era interventions such as mask mandates, lockdowns, and school closures. In their Great Barrington Declaration, Bhattacharya and others argued for "focused protection" of vulnerable people while allowing low-risk groups to resume normal activities. He later sued the government, alleging that it pressured social media companies to censor his views.  
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In her Oxford address, Mamata says her governance model doesn't allow discrimination



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee delivers a keynote address on 'Social Development-Girl, Child and Women Empowerment in West Bengal' at Kellogg College, during a visit to the University of Oxford on March 27, 2025.  
Photo Credit: @AITCofficial/PTI

MARCH 27, 2025  
LONDON (TIP): Addressing a gathering at Kellogg College at the University of Oxford on March 27, 2025, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee stressed the importance of inclusive development and stated that division in society is counterproductive.  
Ms Banerjee said her governance model does not allow discrimination and she prioritizes the welfare of all sections of society.  
"If I die, before my death, I want to see unity. Unity is our strength, and division leads to our fall. This was Swami Vivekananda's belief. Keeping unity is a difficult task, but dividing people takes only a moment. Do you think the world can sustain such divisive ideology?" she asked.  
CONTD ON PAGE 36



Former Chief Minister of Delhi Arvind Kejriwal

FIR LODGED AGAINST ARVIND KEJRIWAL FOR 'MISUSING' PUBLIC MONEY, POLICE INFORMS COURT

MARCH 28, 2025  
NEW DELHI (TIP): Delhi Police on Friday, March 28, 2025, informed a court here that it has lodged an FIR against former chief minister Arvind Kejriwal and others for allegedly misusing public money by putting up large hoardings in the national capital in 2019. The police made the submission in its compliance report filed before Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate Neha Mittal.  
CONTD ON PAGE 36

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## COMMENT

## When Politicians Fear Laughter, Democracies are in Danger

When a comedian's parody can provoke a police case, vandalism, and political outrage, it says far more about the fragility of those in power than the strength of their positions. In Maharashtra, Kunal Kamra's satirical jibe - an improvised parody of a film song using the word gaddar (traitor) - has triggered an astonishing overreaction by supporters of Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde. What began as a stand-up joke has now spiraled into a serious assault on freedom of expression, with police FIRs, venue attacks, and even municipal demolitions. Kamra didn't name anyone. But thin-skinned leaders and their hyper-loyal mobs did the math, and the comedian is now being hunted for hurting the "sentiments" of the politically powerful.

Let's be clear: this is not about satire crossing a line. This is about politicians who want to abolish the line entirely, placing themselves in a space where laughter is not permitted, criticism is criminalized, and public mockery is treated as treason.

### SATIRE HAS ALWAYS MADE KINGS NERVOUS - AND CITIZENS BRAVE

Centuries before Kamra stood on a stage in Mumbai, court jesters in medieval Europe were the only ones allowed to speak uncomfortable truths to monarchs - under the guise of comedy. In France, Molière used biting comedies to ridicule hypocrisy and corruption in the 17th century. His plays were so pointed that clergy and aristocrats tried to shut him down. But Louis XIV, to his credit, saw the value of satire and protected him.

Flash forward to the 18th century. The great English satirist Jonathan Swift, in his essay A Modest Proposal, suggested (with brutal irony) that the Irish poor should sell their children as food to the rich. It was shocking - but it was satire. And it laid bare the cruelty of British colonial policy in Ireland more effectively than any official protest.

Even in modern America, late-night comedians like Jon Stewart and John

Oliver have often done the job that journalists wouldn't - exposing hypocrisy, war propaganda, and corporate corruption. Stewart's takedown of CNN's Crossfire was so impactful that the show was eventually canceled. Did anyone arrest him? No. The satire forced institutions to reflect and reform.

Satire, in every era, holds up a mirror. And the ones who smash the mirror aren't protecting society - they're protecting their image.

### WHY INDIAN POLITICIANS FEAR THE PUNCHLINE

In India today, the political class increasingly wants to be treated not as public servants but as sacred cows - revered, untouched, unchallenged. Any attempt to joke about them is treated not as a healthy sign of democratic discourse but as blasphemy.

And this fear of laughter isn't limited to Maharashtra. Cartoonist Aseem Trivedi was jailed on charges of sedition. Stand-up comics have been targeted, canceled, or investigated for jokes they never even told (as in the case of Munawar Faruqui). Even social media satire now invites FIRs from aggrieved political workers. These are not isolated incidents; they represent a full-blown war on satire.

The irony is that many of these politicians rose to power by mocking others - attacking opponents with slogans, memes, and street plays. But once in power, they want immunity from the very tools they once wielded. The message is clear: you can ridicule, but only if it serves us.

### KAMRA'S "CRIME": DARING TO JOKE IN PUBLIC

Let's revisit what actually happened. Kamra sings a parody using the word gaddar. Shinde's followers - seeing themselves in the unnamed figure - vandalize the performance venue. Instead of reining them in, the Mumbai police books Kamra under new criminal laws for "promoting enmity" and defamation. The municipal corporation suddenly finds

By Indrajit Saluja



"unauthorized structures" and demolishes parts of the venue.

This is not law enforcement. This is punishment theatre. This is politics using state machinery to settle personal scores - dressed up as protecting "public sentiment."

And the most chilling part? The government wants a public apology. Why? Because satire dared to wound pride. This is less about law and more about forced humiliation - the kind of authoritarian reflex you expect from regimes that fear jokes more than they fear corruption.

### DEMOCRACY DIES WHEN YOU CAN'T LAUGH AT IT

Laughter, especially in hard times, has always been a form of resistance. It relieves pressure. It exposes hypocrisy. It says: I see you, and I'm not afraid to call you out. The moment politicians become immune to satire, they also become immune to accountability.

The Constitution of India guarantees freedom of expression. But today, we live in a country where the right exists only on paper - like a toy gifted to a child, but locked away in a glass box. The Kamra episode is just the latest reminder: if you're an artist, your right to speak ends where a politician's ego begins. It doesn't have to be this way.

India has a long, proud tradition of humor - from Tenali Raman and Birbal to Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro and Political Punch. Satire has always helped us cope, and more importantly, helped us think. If we begin punishing it, we're not just silencing comedians - we're silencing citizens.

### LET THE POLITICIANS TAKE A JOKE

History teaches us that satire doesn't destroy democracy - it protects it. The French Revolution had its caricatures, the American civil rights movement had its protest songs, and the fight against apartheid had sharp political theatre.

So, here's some free advice to India's politicians: learn to take a joke. If you can't laugh at yourselves, maybe you're the problem, not the punchline.

## GUEST COMMENT

## Crippling debt trap: Punjab, HP can take a cue from Haryana

The AAP government in Punjab has been waging a war on drugs as well as corruption, but it hasn't put up a strong fight against fiscal indiscipline. Successive governments in the state have been living beyond their means, and the current dispensation is continuing in the same vein as if there is no tomorrow. Punjab is the second-most indebted state (after Arunachal Pradesh) in the country in terms of the debt-to-GSDP (gross state domestic product) ratio. There is nothing surprising or shocking about this dubious distinction. The state finished last among 18 major states on the NITI Aayog's Fiscal Health Index just two months ago. A similarly grim picture was painted by the Comptroller and Auditor General's audit report in September last year - the state's expenditure has been consistently outpacing its revenue receipts.

Things have come to such a pass that fresh loans are being taken not only to repay previous ones but also to meet routine expenses.

AAP never tires of blaming the Akali-BJP and Congress governments for the crippling debt burden, but it has added to the mess by offering subsidies and freebies without bothering about the state exchequer's precarious position. It's obvious that tough, unpopular decisions have to be taken. Having antagonized the farming community by evicting protesters from Shambhu and Khanauri borders, will AAP go on to withdraw or rationalize free electricity for farmers? And will it also discontinue the freebie being given to domestic power consumers? However, electoral compulsions may prevent the ruling party from taking such drastic steps, even though they may be beneficial for Punjab in the long run.

Neighboring Himachal Pradesh is also facing a financial crisis, despite conscious efforts by the Congress government to tighten its belt. Revenue from the tourism, hydropower and agriculture sectors has been dwarfed by mega borrowings to fund infrastructure projects. Arresting the alarming slide should be a top priority for both Punjab and HP, which can take a cue from Haryana's reasonably good model to manage debt and generate revenue. (Tribune, India)

# Beena Kothari Inaugurated as President of AIA-NY



The newly sworn-in Executive of AIA-NY led by Beena Kothari with Legislator Rosemary Walker



Recognizing the AIA Past Presidents

**MARCH 22, 2025**  
**MINEOLA, NY (TIP):** The Association of Indians in America - New York Chapter (AIA-NY), on March 20, held a momentous inauguration swearing-in of Beena Kothari as the new

President, along with the Executive Committee.

The event was attended by over 150 distinguished guests, including elected officials, AIA founding members, Board of Trustees, AIA Past Presidents,

community leaders, members, and media partners.

A plaque was presented to outgoing President of AIA-NY Dr. Jagdish Gupta for his leadership of AIA-NY.

The inauguration ceremony featured the singing of the American and Indian national anthems by Bina Sabapathy, Jyoti Gupta, and Roopam Maini, as well as a Ganesh Vandana performance by Hamsaasya School of Dance. Harsh Vyas and Jasbir Jay Singh served as emcees.

President Beena Kothari and other dignitaries delivered inspiring speeches, emphasizing the importance of preserving Indian heritage and culture in the USA, while promoting integration with mainstream America.

#### AIA-NY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, SWORN IN INCLUDED:

- President: Beena Kothari
- Vice Presidents: Anita Thakkar, Dr. Tarun Wasil, Harsh Vyas, Nilima Madaan
- Treasurer: Dr. Bal K. Gilja
- Secretary: Dr. Sharad Kothari
- Members-at-Large: -
- Anju Sharma, Bhavana Sharma, Deepak Bansal, Deepika Modi
- Dr. Narendra Lodha, Dr. Sumita Sengupta, Dr. Usha Bansal,
- Gobind Bathija, Jay Jasbir Singh, Jyoti Gupta
- Kiran Reddy Parvathala, Narinder Kapoor
- Navneet Agarwal, Nick Garg, Nutan Roongta
- Roopam Maini, Sanju Sharma, Surin Manaktala
- Swati Vaishnav, Satnam Singh Parhar

#### PRESIDENT BEENA KOTHARI'S VISION:

In her inspiring address, President Kothari emphasized the importance of cultural preservation and community engagement. "We represent not only ourselves but also our rich cultural heritage, values, and aspirations. We are the bridge between our Indian roots and our American dreams. Together, let us strive to take AIA to new heights and continue to serve our community with pride and purpose."

Embracing the inclusive spirit of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam', Beena strives to break down barriers and build bridges. She believes in the potential of young individuals and women to drive



President Beena Kothari presenting a bouquet to Legislator Rosemary Walker

positive change and is committed to empowering them to become leaders.

Beena's ultimate goal is to contribute meaningfully to the community, spreading love, kindness, and compassion, and making the world a better place for all.

#### UPCOMING INITIATIVES:

- Holi Celebration - March 26th, in collaboration with CUNY Asian American Student Board
- Annual Fundraising Gala for Deepavali - June 1st
- National AIA Medical Council Awards Gala - May 3rd, at Cipriani 42nd Street, Manhattan
- Desi Next Youth - (TBD)
- Fundraiser Dinner AIA's Project India - July 20th
- AIA-NY Iconic Deepavali Festival - October 2025

Beena Kothari's speech was a heartfelt tribute to the individuals who have contributed to the organization's success. She acknowledged the vital role played by past presidents, volunteers, sponsors, and supporters.

The evening concluded with a heartfelt thank-you note by Treasurer Dr. Bal K. Gilja and Secretary Dr. Sharad Kothari, followed by a celebratory dinner.

The event marked the beginning of a new chapter for AIA-NY, filled with a commitment to unity, cultural preservation, and community service.



President Beena Kothari is congratulated by family and friends

## Indian-origin arrested in Nepal with narcotic drugs



Ritesh Kumar was arrested at Nepal's Gautam Buddha International Airport and 15 kg of hemp was recovered from his possession, police said.

Photo for representation only.

**MARCH 26, 2025**

**KATHMANDU (TIP):** A 34-year-old Indian national was arrested at Nepal's Gautam Buddha International Airport and 15 kg of hemp was recovered from his possession, police said.

The narcotic item was recovered from Ritesh Kumar, who had landed in Bhairahawa in western Nepal from Bangkok, Thailand, on a Thai Air Asia flight, according to the police.

He was arrested at the airport's arrival gate and the police recovered the drug hidden in his suitcase during a security check.

Further investigation into the matter is underway.

## Indian-origin man, daughter killed in US store shooting



Pradipkumar Patel and his daughter were shot dead at a convenience store in the state of Virginia and police have arrested one person in connection with the shooting, according to media reports.

**MARCH 24, 2025**

**ACCOMACK, VA (TIP):** A 56-year-old Indian-origin man and his 24-year-old daughter were shot dead at a convenience store in the state of Virginia and police have arrested one person in connection with the shooting, according to media reports.

Pradipkumar Patel and his daughter were working at the store on Lankford Highway in Accomack County when the shooting incident happened. Accomack County is located on the Eastern Shore of Virginia.

The Accomack County Sheriff's office said deputies were called to the scene shortly after 5:30 am on March 20 on reports of a shooting victim, media reported.

When they arrived, deputies discovered an unresponsive man suffering from apparent gunshot wounds, it said.

While searching the building, deputies found a woman suffering from apparent gunshot wounds as well.

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

# Two Georgia-based Indian Americans arrested for scamming elderly woman of over \$100K

**MARCH 24, 2025**

**ATLANTA, GA (TIP):** Two Dalton residents, Amit Patel, 37, and Dishaben Patel, 28, were arrested in Monticello, Kentucky, on March 19 in connection with a scam that defrauded an elderly woman of tens of thousands of dollars. The pair face charges of Theft by Deception over \$10,000, Exploitation of an Adult, and Engaging in Organized Crime.

Authorities say the scam began on March 12 when the victim's computer froze and displayed a fraudulent message instructing her to call a number. When she did, scammers posing as Federal Trade Commission (FTC) agents told her that her identity had been compromised and convinced her to withdraw \$52,000 in cash. She placed the money in a shoebox and handed it to a man who arrived at



Amit Patel and Dishaben Patel were arrested in Monticello, Kentucky, on March 19 in connection with a scam that defrauded an elderly woman of tens of thousands of dollars

her home.

A similar incident occurred on March 17, when the victim was pressured into withdrawing an additional \$32,000, which she again handed over. A third cash pickup for \$50,000 was scheduled for

March 19, but by then, authorities were tracking the transactions. After the suspects retrieved the shoebox, police conducted a traffic stop at the intersection of Castle and Elk streets in Monticello. Officers recovered the cash and arrested Patel and Patel.

Investigators have not disclosed whether the suspects targeted other victims or if similar schemes were conducted in the Dalton area. Both remain in custody at the Wayne County Detention Center as the investigation continues.

Authorities urge residents, particularly seniors, to be cautious of unsolicited messages claiming security threats to their computers or finances. Anyone with additional information is encouraged to contact local law enforcement.

## Indian student enrolments in New Zealand surge by 48.9 per cent, expected to nearly double by 2030

*Meanwhile, Australia continues to strengthen its position as a top choice for Indian students, offering world-class universities*

**MARCH 25, 2025**

**NEW YORK / JALANDHAR(TIP):** Indian student enrolments in New Zealand have increased by 48.9 per cent since 2021 and are projected to nearly double by 2030, according to a report released by University Living, a global student housing platform. The report, Beyond Beds and Benches - Decoding ANZ's Education System, highlights the growing appeal of New Zealand and Australia as preferred study destinations for international students, particularly from India.

The Oceania region has witnessed a steady rise in student migration, growing from 2.1 million in 2015 to 2.3 million in 2024. Indian student enrolments in Australia also saw a 9.2 per cent increase between 2021 and 2024. The sector's economic impact is substantial, with international education contributing approximately NZD 4.4 billion to New Zealand's economy and AUD 47.8 billion to Australia's in the 2023-2024 period.

Saurabh Arora, Founder and CEO of University Living, attributed the rise in enrolments to policy reforms that simplify the study-abroad journey and enhance post-study career prospects. "New Zealand's streamlined visa processes, work-rights policies, and the introduction of NZD 10,000 scholarships for high-achieving Indian students highlight the government's commitment to attracting global talent," he said. Enrolments from India in New Zealand are expected to grow by 93.9 per cent between 2025 and 2030, increasing from 22,225 to 42,594.

Meanwhile, Australia continues to strengthen its position as a top choice for Indian students, offering world-class universities, industry-integrated education, and extended post-study work rights.

Vik Singh, Trade and Investment Commissioner for South Asia at Austrade,



Indian student enrolments in New Zealand have increased by 48.9 per cent since 2021 and are projected to nearly double by 2030, according to a report released by University Living, a global student housing platform.

Photo for representation only

emphasized Australia's commitment to fostering global partnerships and providing a seamless education-to-employment transition. "Australia ensures students are well-prepared for the future, with a strong support system, high-quality education, and an inclusive environment," he said.

Both countries are prioritizing industry-aligned education, particularly in STEM, healthcare, and business sectors, to enhance employability. While the US, UK, and Canada continue to dominate as study destinations, Australia and New Zealand are rapidly gaining traction, with India, China, Nepal, Vietnam, and Indonesia emerging as key source countries.

Saurabh further said that with growing international enrolments, the demand for student accommodation is increasing, further reinforcing Australia and New Zealand's status as leading education hubs. "By 2025, Indian student enrolments in Australia are expected to surpass 1,01,552, while New Zealand is projected to host 22,225 Indian students, further cementing the region's status as a preferred destination for higher education", he added. (With inputs from TNS)

## Indian-origin missing 30-year-old man found dead



Abhishek Kolli from Gudivada in Andhra Pradesh's Krishna district who was reported missing has been found dead

**MARCH 25, 2025**

**HOUSTON (TIP):** A 30-year-old Indian-origin man was found dead in Princeton, Texas, on Sunday, March 2, in what local authorities suspect to be a case of suicide, but investigations are ongoing.

Abhishek Kolli, from Gudivada in Andhra Pradesh's Krishna district, had been reported missing a day earlier, prompting a search operation involving law enforcement and community members.

His body was discovered the following day, leaving his family and loved ones devastated.

Kolli, who had been married for just a year, had previously lived with his wife in Phoenix, Texas, before relocating to Princeton.

His twin brother, Aravind Kolli, revealed that Abhishek had been unemployed for the past six months and was struggling with financial difficulties.

"His sudden passing is an unbearable loss for us," Aravind shared. "We want to honor his memory with dignity, without the shadow of financial worry hanging over us."

To cover funeral expenses and transport his body back to India, Aravind launched a GoFundMe campaign, which has already raised over USD 59,000 in less than 24 hours.

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

## Indian American Shohini Sinha law enforcement official appointed to important role in FBI

MARCH 26, 2025

**WASHINGTON, D.C. (TIP):** An Indian American law enforcement official, who worked on temporary assignments at the Guantanamo Bay Naval Base, has been appointed to a critical role in the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).

Shohini Sinha has been named by the FBI as the assistant director of the Victim Services Division. She has most recently served as the special agent in charge of the Salt Lake City Field Office.

Sinha joined the FBI as a special agent in 2001. She was first assigned to the Milwaukee Field Office, where she worked in counterterrorism investigations. She also served temporary assignments at the Guantanamo Bay Naval Base, the FBI Legal Attaché Office in London, and the Baghdad Operations Centre, a statement issued here said.

She was promoted in 2009 to supervisory special agent and transferred to the Counterterrorism Division in Washington, DC. She served as program manager of Canada-based



Shohini Sinha has been named by the FBI as the assistant director of the Victim Services Division

extraterritorial investigations and facilitated liaison efforts with Washington-based Canadian liaison officers.

In 2012, Sinha was promoted to assistant legal attaché in Ottawa, Canada, working on counterterrorism matters in collaboration with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the

Canadian Security Intelligence Service.

In 2015, she was promoted to field supervisor in the Detroit Field Office, where she led squads responsible for investigating international terrorism matters.

In early 2020, Sinha was transferred to the Cyber Intrusion squad, which worked on national security and criminal cyber intrusion matters. Later in 2020, she was promoted to assistant special agent in charge for national security matters, and later criminal matters, in the Portland Field Office.

Sinha was selected to serve as the executive special assistant to the director in 2021. She has been serving as the special agent in charge of the Salt Lake City Field Office since July of 2023.

Before her employment with the FBI, Sinha worked as a therapist and later as an administrator for a private, not-for-profit clinic. She earned a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's degree in mental health counselling from Purdue University in Indiana, it said.

Indian American researcher  
Ashish Aphale sparks  
innovation in clean energy  
storage solutions



Ashish Aphale is leading a team of students to sparking innovation in clean energy through their work on energy storage and conversion systems.

MARCH 27, 2025

**ATLANTA, GA (TIP):** Ashish Aphale, an Indian American assistant professor at Kennesaw State University, Georgia, is leading a team of students to sparking innovation in clean energy through their work on energy storage and conversion systems.

Supported by a National Science Foundation (NSF) grant, the research aims to study the influence of hydrogen on the growth of metal oxide nanostructures, with the goal of enhancing electrode performance in energy storage devices, according to a university release.

Aphale's research focuses on the development of advanced materials, such as polymers, nanocomposites, ceramics, and alloys, which can be used to improve energy storage systems like batteries, fuel cells, and other energy conversion devices.

"Energy storage and conversion systems are pivotal to advancing clean energy," said Aphale, who teaches in the Southern Polytechnic College of Engineering and Engineering Technology. "Improving electrode material performance in energy systems can reduce their overall cost, making them more viable for large-scale use and transforming clean energy technologies into a more reliable power source."

Aphale is also exploring ways to expand the use of carbon nanomaterials in energy storage devices. By enhancing the properties of these materials at the molecular level, his team is creating the next generation of energy storage devices to be more efficient, longer lasting, and less expensive to produce.

In addition to this work, Aphale's research plays a vital role in addressing the environmental challenges caused by the reliance on fossil fuels, according to the release.

Currently, clean energy technologies, particularly solid oxide fuel cells also known as SOFCs, are impeded by trace airborne contaminants that can reduce their performance and lifespan. To overcome this, Aphale's lab creates advanced materials designed to resist these contaminants, which improves the performance of fuel cell devices.

At KSU, Aphale's Clean Energy Materials Engineering and Research Lab (CEMER) has become a melting pot for students from various academic backgrounds. (Read full story at [www.theindianpanorama.news](http://www.theindianpanorama.news))

## Kennesaw-based Indian American man charged with attempted kidnapping at Walmart



Mahendra Patel has been arrested and charged with attempted kidnapping at a Walmart in Acworth.

MARCH 23, 2025

**ATLANTA, GA (TIP):** A 56-year-old Kennesaw man has been arrested and charged with attempted kidnapping at a Walmart in Acworth.

Mahendra Patel was taken into custody on March 21, 2025, after Acworth Police identified him as the suspect in the incident, which took place on March 18 at Walmart located at 3105 Cobb Parkway. According to authorities, Patel approached a mother inside the store, inquired about Tylenol, and then attempted to grab her child. The mother managed to retrieve her child, and Patel fled the scene before law enforcement arrived.

Acworth detectives utilized surveillance footage and FLOCK cameras to identify Patel, leading to his arrest three days later. He has been charged with kidnapping (felony), as well as simple assault and simple battery (both misdemeanors).

Patel is currently being held without bond at the Cobb County Sheriff's Office. Authorities have not released further details about the incident, and the investigation remains ongoing.

## Indian American executive Sudarshan Mandayam named Bounteous CEO

MARCH 27, 2025

**CHICAGO, IL (TIP):** Indian American executive Sudarshan Mandayam is taking over as CEO of Bounteous, Chicago-based leading global digital transformation consultancy, from April 1, following the completion of its merger with Accolite Digital.

This leadership transition signals a new chapter in Bounteous' journey - focused on delivering lasting client impact through Co-Innovation, deeper client partnerships, and execution at scale, according to a company press release.

Mandayam has extensive global leadership experience across the Americas, EMEA, and APAC regions, having held senior roles at industry leaders such as Cognizant, Infosys, L&T Infotech, JPMorgan, and Citi.

He brings a proven record of driving growth, scaling businesses, leading digital transformation initiatives, and delivering measurable client outcomes through high-performing teams.

Most recently serving as President, Americas at Bounteous, Mandayam played a pivotal role in integrating the merged company, sharpening the company's strategic focus, aligning teams, and advancing its ability to deliver differentiated digital solutions, the release stated.

"I am honored to lead Bounteous into its next phase of growth," said Mandayam. "As AI and digital technologies rapidly reshape every industry, we are uniquely positioned to help our clients transform with speed and purpose - combining strategy, experience innovation, and AI-driven execution to deliver measurable, lasting impact."

Mandayam succeeds Keith Schwartz, Co-Founder and former CEO of Bounteous and Leela Kaza, Founder and former CEO of Accolite Digital. Schwartz and Kaza jointly led the merged company for the past fourteen months as Co-CEOs and will assume new roles as Vice Chairmen of the Board, where they will continue to support the company's strategic direction and vision. "Sudarshan deeply understands the value of Co-Innovation and has already demonstrated an exceptional ability to deliver impact at scale," said Keith Schwartz. "He leads with clarity and purpose, and his ability to bring together diverse capabilities - across strategy, design, and technology - will ensure Bounteous continues to be the digital transformation partner of choice for leading enterprises."

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



Sudarshan Mandayam is taking over as CEO of Bounteous, Chicago-based leading global digital transformation consultancy, from April 1

# JAY JASBIR SINGH TAKES THE REINS AS THE NEW IALI PRESIDENT

MARCH 22, 2025

**MINEOLA, NY (TIP):** In a dazzling event attended by prominent figures, the oath-taking ceremony for the India Association of Long Island (IALI) took place at Nassau County's Theodore Roosevelt Executive and Legislative Building. During this ceremony, various elected officials swore in the esteemed community leader, Jasbir Jay Singh, along with his team.

Founded in 1978, the India Association of Long Island (IALI) is one of the oldest nonprofit organizations, representing the Indo-American community on Long Island, New York.

In a remarkable turn of events, Jasbir Jay Singh was elected as the new president of IALI, with no formal



Jay Jasbir Singh taking the oath of office

president, Pardeep Tandon, for his leadership, vision, and efforts in forming a new committee without a formal election process.

Nassau County Comptroller Elaine Phillips also spoke at the ceremony, emphasizing the importance of community organizations like IALI. "The beauty of IALI is that the government cannot do it alone. We need organizations like yours to work alongside us to make our communities better. We are so fortunate to live in this community," she said. She further added, "It is such an honor for me tonight to swear in Jasbir Jay Singh as the new president."

In addition to President Jasbir Jay Singh, the following individuals took the



Hargobind Gupta and Sujata Seth took the oath of office as Secretary and Treasurer respectively of IALI



opposition. All other nominees withdrew their candidacies in recognition of Singh's immense contribution to the community and his efforts to preserve the organization's funds and foster unity within the IALI family.

The event was graced by several distinguished figures, including Nassau County Comptroller Elaine Phillips, Town of North Hempstead Supervisor Jennifer DeSena, Town of Oyster Bay Supervisor Joseph Saladino, Nassau

County Commission on Human Rights Chairman Dr. Bobby K. Kalotee, Town of North Hempstead Clerk Ragini Srivastava, Town of Hempstead Clerk Kate Murray, and Legislator Rose Marie Walker, all of whom witnessed the ceremony and administered the oath to the new appointees.

Addressing the audience, Jay Singh expressed his heartfelt gratitude, saying, "I want to thank all of you for your trust and support. I recognize the immense



A view of the gathering



The immediate past president, Pardeep Tandon was recognized and thanked for his leadership, vision, and efforts in forming a new committee without a formal election process.

responsibility that comes with this role and am dedicated to serving each member of our community." He went on to acknowledge the past presidents of IALI, stating, "I also want to recognize the pillars of the IALI. Our purpose is Seva (service), not to rule. I aim to make you all proud, and I hope that, by the end of this year, everyone will look back and say that it was a successful year for IALI."

Jay Singh also took a moment to specially thank the immediate past

oath for their respective roles: Vice President Ravindra Kumar, Secretary Hargobind Gupta, Treasurer Sujata Seth and Members at Large Abha Bhatnagar, Ashwini Sharma, Deepak Bansal, Mohan Sharma, Munish Byala, Reenu Kapoor, Shashi Goyal, Vinod Goyal, Neeru Bhambri, Amita Karwal and Sanju Sharma.

(Based on a press release issued by Munish Byala)

## Meditation Teacher Parveen Chopra introduces Hinduism to high schoolers on Long Island



Parveen Chopra, Editor-Publisher of ALotusInTheMud.com, explains the basics of Hinduism to students of the school in Merrick, using a whiteboard.

**MARCH 27, 2025**

**MERRICK, NY (TIP):** Parveen Chopra, Editor-Publisher of ALotusInTheMud.com and a meditation teacher, introduced Hinduism to 9th graders at Sanford H. Calhoun High School in Merrick, NY on March 24. His presentation to multiple groups of 15-20 boys and girls each was part of a Multi-Faith Forum program at the school aimed to make students understand diverse faiths better.

A majority of the students at this school are Christians, with a sprinkling of Jews, and barely any other faiths. Chopra found they did not know much about Hinduism, but they were attentive and eager to learn.



(From left): Presenters Rev. Tim TenClay, Parveen Chopra, Cheryl Bennett and Daisy Khan with Timothy Dolan, Social Studies Chairperson of the Calhoun High School.

Given the 15-20 minute slot for each group before they were shepherded to the Islam table and Christianity and Judaism tables, he confined himself to talking about the basics. He introduced the young students to Om, Namaste, Swastika (and how it differs from the Nazi hakenkreuz). He told them that yoga has origins in Hinduism, and that meditation is an essential part of yoga despite yoga in popular culture becoming identified with physical postures. He even had them meditate for a couple of minutes at the end of his talk.

Clearing the misconception that Hinduism is otherworldly and promotes renunciation, Chopra said it prescribes four aims of life -- Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha. But the pursuit of material things and fulfilling desires should be in alignment with dharma or righteousness,

which will lead to moksha.

One student pointed out that Hinduism is monotheistic. Chopra said it is correct, but there are also thousands of deities, gods, and goddesses, which many people can relate to and worship instead of a formless, nameless ultimate reality called Brahman (the underlying ground of all, a concept different from God).

Chopra shared with the children some common strands running between Hinduism and the three other faiths that originated in the Indian subcontinent, namely Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism. Reincarnation-karma theory is one of them. Pursuit of liberation in this very life is another.

One teacher who dropped by wanted to know about the caste system. Chopra agreed that it has bedeviled Indian society for long but has been weakening in modern times. Called Varna vyavastha, it was based on social and economic roles, but over time it became rigid and generational.

As an interesting sidelight, only a handful of students could name the Vice President of America, J.D. Vance, so no way they would know that his wife, Usha, is a Hindu.

Chopra told TIP, "Talking non-stop on my feet for six hours with one coffee and bagel break made me tip my hat to schoolteachers everywhere who do it day in and day out. My fellow presenter, Daisy Khan, could not even take a sip of water as she was observing Ramadan fasting."

Two other presenters of the day were - Tim TenClay and Cheryl Bennett. Timothy Dolan, Social Studies Chairperson of the school shepherded the students.

Simultaneously a similar program was conducted in Three Village Central School District in Suffolk County, under Christine Cone, Director of Social Studies. Both programs were coordinated by the Interfaith Institute of Long Island, in Westbury, chaired by Dr. Faroque A Khan.

Reaching out and interacting with 900 plus youngsters in Suffolk and Nassau was made possible by the presenters who gave their time pro bono.

## Suozzi Welcomes Supercentenarian to the United States on Pakistan Day



Tom Suozzi with the 113-year-old Sardar Khatoon and her family on the occasion of Pakistan Day on March 23, 2025

**MARCH 24, 2025**

**GLEN COVE, NY (TIP):** Tom Suozzi (D - Long Island, Queens) celebrated Pakistan Day (3/23) by welcoming 113-year-old Sardar Khatoon to the United States at a ceremony at Shaheen Restaurant in Hicksville.

"Yaum-E-Pakistan Mubarak!" Suozzi declared. "This is a very exciting day because we now have, in our presence, the second oldest person in the United States of America."

Suozzi, who serves as the Co-Chair of the bipartisan Pakistan Caucus, advocated for Ms. Khatoon and her family, who struggled with the visa process for over five years. Her family had been in the United States for 35 years, with Ms. Khatoon unable to join them. In December of 2024, after facing medical issues, Ms. Khatoon's family reached out to Suozzi's office for assistance in expediting the process.

Thanks to the dedicated efforts of Suozzi and his staff, including personal calls between Suozzi and the U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan, Ms. Khatoon's visa was issued on March 6, 2025. She arrived at New York's JFK Airport on March 12, happy, healthy, and greeted by her loving family. She will reside with her family in Jericho, New York.

Pakistan Day, celebrated every March 23, commemorates the adoption of the first Constitution of Pakistan in 1956 and the passage of the Lahore Resolution in 1940.

Born on January 1, 1912, in Larkana Sindh, Pakistan, Ms. Khatoon is 4 years older than the Lahore Resolution and 44 years older than the Constitution.

"It's only appropriate that on Pakistan Day, we are all here to celebrate this family, who after a long time has finally been able to come together here in America, only because of the great relationship we share between the United States and Pakistan," Suozzi said.

During Sunday's ceremony, Congressman Suozzi was joined by Mr. Abdul Latif, an attaché of the Pakistan Embassy to the United States, and members of the Pakistani community, including Ms. Khatoon's family, in celebration of Pakistan Day. Suozzi presented Ms. Khatoon with a U.S. flag that was flown over the Capitol, along with a citation.

Through a translator, Ms. Khatoon said, "God Bless. I love America."

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# Trump putting US soft power in jeopardy

THE MAGA POLICY IS BOUND TO HIT AMERICA'S GLOBAL IMAGE AND DIMINISH ITS LONG-TERM INFLUENCE



By Manoj Joshi

"American soft power exerted itself not only through the dollars and cents of its foreign aid funding commitments, but through four main pillars. First, the cultural influence of its entertainment and media industries and its education system that led the world in innovation and technology. The second was the political example of its commitment to democracy, equality and human rights, as well as its vibrant civil society. The third was the power and perceptions it derived from the policies of the institutions it helped create - the UN, World Bank and so on. The fourth, its dynamic consumer-oriented economy ensured that the US has retained its status as the largest economy in the world since WWII."

In the 1990s, the New York Times carried a report about a Chinese delegation touring Broadway in New York. The visitors' goal was to learn how that fabled theatre district worked and how it could be reproduced in Shanghai or Beijing. The Chinese understood well that US power was not just in its military, but also in its vibrant culture.

The hallmark of power is the ability of a country to shape the policies of others. This can be through hard power - military and financial - but it is often more easily done through soft power, the attraction and persuasion you are able to exert because of your culture, values and ideology.

For four years after World War II, the US had a monopoly of nuclear weapons. These were the years in which it launched the Marshall Plan to revive Europe and created the NATO military alliance to cement its global authority. But it also helped create the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the World Health Organisation, the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs to provide global governance to deliver



The MAGA policy is bound to hit America's global image and diminish its long-term influence

public goods in the areas of development finance, health and trade.

These became instruments of US soft power along with the steadily rising American prosperity that supercharged its cultural appeal around the world. The shutdown of USAID, America's principal aid-giving agency, has brought out just how dramatically the Trump administration plans to gut the ways in which US has exercised power around the world so far.

USAID was the largest donor of official development assistance in the world. The \$70 billion it provided annually was spread out among countries where it had strategic interests, such as Ukraine, Jordan and Palestine, and where it provided humanitarian assistance - Sudan, Yemen, South Sudan, Afghanistan and so on.

Tempering hard power with soft has been an established strategy of the US that other countries, including India, have sought to follow. In the 1950s and 1960s, USAID played a significant role in helping India's development goals in the fields of health, agriculture, food and education. But this was a clever means of deflecting Indian unhappiness arising out of its policy of arming Pakistan.

American soft power exerted itself not only through the dollars and cents of its foreign aid funding commitments, but through four main pillars. First, the cultural influence of its entertainment and media industries and its education system that led the world in innovation and technology. The second was the political example of its commitment to democracy, equality and human rights,

as well as its vibrant civil society. The third was the power and perceptions it derived from the policies of the institutions it helped create - the UN, World Bank and so on. The fourth, its dynamic consumer-oriented economy ensured that the US has retained its status as the largest economy in the world since WWII.

These exerted a pull among students and researchers, businessmen looking for opportunity, artistes and performers as well as workers who flocked to the US in ever larger numbers, through legal or illegal means. Around the world, the US was admired for its democratic system, its prosperity and technological leadership. Its culture and fashions were widely imitated and there was a perception that its policies contained a dash of altruism absent from those of other big powers.

Today, all this is being turned inside out. The 'America First' policy of the Trump administration seeks to put US interests ahead of everything else. The US President's attempt to overturn the verdict of the 2020 elections or attack the vaunted judicial system has hit important institutions of democracy.

Under attack within the US are universities, research institutions, charities, the media and even the Church - all of whom are being asked to conform to the demands of the MAGA (Make America Great Again) movement. Trump's threat to defund universities for alleged transgressions undermines the intellectual freedom that has characterized American culture. Besides undocumented aliens, the Trump administration is making life difficult

for foreigners in general, visa holders, tourists, permanent resident or Green Card holders. These actions strike at the very heart of American soft power.

Around the world, American soft power has been envied. Today, Shanghai and Beijing have Broadway-like theatre districts. Besides culture, China has reached out to foreign countries to promote Chinese language through Confucius institutes and scholarships to attract students, another hallmark of soft power. India is another country that uses a mix of soft and hard power to navigate complex foreign policy challenges. This country is a major destination for foreign students.

It is easy to claim that soft power can be given short shrift in our hyper-realist era. But the reality is that hard power by itself cannot achieve what a combination of hard and soft power, or "smart power" can do. Else, China or Russia would be seen as the more desirable countries in the world. Instead, whether it is the rich countries, or middle-income ones, the US is the more preferred option, as it has been for millions of migrants seeking to improve their lives.

Despite Trump, the US is likely to retain its primacy around the world - through its films, music and technology. But by undermining trust among allies and altering the global perception of US values and goals, the MAGA policy is bound to damage America's global image and diminish its long-term influence.

(Manoj Joshi is a Senior Journalist & Distinguished Fellow, Observer Research Foundation)



# President Trump's Executive Order Focused on Election Integrity Signals a Turning Point for American Democracy



By Prof. Indrajit S Saluja

I am no admirer of President Donald Trump. I may find a hundred and one faults with the man. But for once, I have all the praise for him for his bold move aimed at restoring public trust and ensuring the sanctity of America's electoral process.

President Donald J. Trump has issued a sweeping Executive Order focused on election integrity. This decisive action, long awaited by millions of Americans, seeks to address a growing crisis of confidence in the U.S. voting system—one that has lingered for years across party lines.

The Executive Order is not just a document of reform—it is a blueprint for securing the future of American democracy. In a world where faith in institutions is rapidly declining, the importance of credible, secure, and transparent elections cannot be overstated. President Trump's initiative represents a clear acknowledgment that the foundation of any republic lies in the trust its citizens place in the ballot box.

## A SYSTEM IN NEED OF REFORM

Despite being the world's oldest constitutional democracy, the United States has frequently found itself under fire for electoral inconsistencies. The 21st-century American election landscape has grown increasingly chaotic, marred by confusing rules, patchwork regulations, and prolonged tabulation timelines. Each election cycle brings with it a new wave of public skepticism, court challenges, and media-fueled drama. This is not a sign of a healthy democracy.

President Trump's order directly responds to these issues by laying out a comprehensive plan to modernize, standardize, and safeguard the voting process. From voter ID mandates to transparent tabulation protocols, this Executive Order seeks to end the cycle of confusion and restore faith in our most sacred civic exercise.

## LEARNING FROM GLOBAL BEST PRACTICES

Perhaps one of the most striking and commendable elements of the Executive Order is its recognition of successful electoral models abroad. In a gesture of humility and wisdom, President Trump cited examples of countries that have implemented robust, fraud-resistant systems despite larger or more complex electorates.

India, the world's largest democracy, has long employed biometric voter ID systems to prevent impersonation and duplicate voting. Germany, known for its efficient and transparent elections, relies on paper ballots and decentralized scrutiny to eliminate tampering concerns. These countries don't just conduct elections—they set standards. By learning from such systems, the U.S. can reclaim its global leadership in democratic governance.

It is paradoxical that while the U.S. promotes democracy around the world, it continues to tolerate electoral vulnerabilities at home. As President Trump rightly emphasized, adopting best practices from other nations is not a sign of weakness but of strength. A truly great nation evolves, learns, and leads by example.

## CORE TENETS OF THE EXECUTIVE ORDER

At the heart of the Executive Order lies a powerful yet simple truth: every legal vote must count—and only legal votes must count. This foundational principle has too often been lost in the noise of political bickering. The order reaffirms this standard through a series of logical, necessary reforms:

**Mandatory Voter ID:** A national requirement for government-issued photo identification or biometric verification would bring consistency and security to the voting process. The argument that voter ID laws are burdensome is outdated and condescending—Americans already use IDs for virtually every essential function, from travel to medicine.

**Ban on Unsolicited Mass Mail-In Ballots:** The Executive Order recommends eliminating the practice of mailing ballots without verification. While absentee voting for those who truly need it remains protected, the new



Trump's Executive Order is not just a document of reform—it is a blueprint for securing the future of American democracy

These reforms are not Republican or Democrat in nature—they are commonsense protections that uphold the integrity of our republic. In fact, polls show that a majority of Americans across the political spectrum support voter ID laws and stronger election oversight.

standard prioritizes oversight and accuracy over convenience.

**Election Day Voting Preference:** Encouraging in-person voting on Election Day reduces delays and tampering risks. While early and absentee options are necessary, the system should not be stretched to the point of dysfunction.

**Transparent Tabulation and Oversight:** The Executive Order calls for vote counting to be done under clear observation, with strict chain-of-custody measures for every ballot. This includes requiring all voting machines to be disconnected from the internet—a step toward eliminating digital vulnerabilities and restoring confidence.

**Federal Election Integrity Commission:** To ensure uniformity and compliance, the order proposes the creation of a federal commission tasked with implementing and monitoring election standards nationwide. This body would serve as a watchdog to prevent irregularities and ensure every state adheres to high standards.

These reforms are not Republican or Democrat in nature—they are commonsense protections that uphold the integrity of our republic. In fact, polls show that a majority of Americans across the political spectrum support voter ID laws and stronger election oversight.

## ADDRESSING "ILLEGAL VOTE DILUTION"

One of the most groundbreaking elements of the Executive Order is its emphasis on what it terms "illegal vote dilution." The idea is straightforward: every illegal or improperly verified vote effectively cancels out a lawful one. That's not just a statistical error—it's a moral failure.

For too long, election reforms have ignored this problem. The President's directive places it front and center, rightly arguing that every eligible citizen's voice should carry equal weight. This is not voter suppression—it's voter protection.

When people lose confidence that their vote matters or fear that fraudulent votes will overwhelm legitimate ones—they disengage. That is perhaps the most dangerous form of disenfranchisement. The Executive Order, by emphasizing legal protections and verifiable processes, seeks to reverse that trend.

## TECHNOLOGY AND SECURITY UPGRADES

In today's interconnected world, no election can be considered secure without addressing cyber threats. The Executive Order also calls for vital technological reforms, including updated infrastructure, routine audits, and offline vote tabulation equipment. These proposals follow the lead of countries like France, which banned electronic voting for overseas citizens in 2017 due to hacking concerns.

In the same spirit, routine audits and paper trails are promoted not as partisan instruments, but as guarantees of credibility. An honest system does not fear oversight—it embraces it.

## CRITICS AND THEIR MISGUIDED ARGUMENTS

As expected, the Executive Order has already drawn criticism from certain quarters. Some claim it will suppress votes or discourage participation. Others suggest it's an attempt to undermine confidence in past election results. These arguments are not just misleading—they ignore the plain intent of the reform.

Requiring voter ID or banning unverified mail-in voting is no more suppressive than requiring identification to enter a federal building or fly on an airplane. The opposition to such measures is driven more by politics than by concern for voter rights.

President Trump is not relitigating the past—he is preparing the nation for the future. If anything, this Executive Order reflects a desire to move beyond the controversies of recent elections by building a process that is above reproach.

## A CALL FOR BIPARTISAN SUPPORT

Reforming elections should not be a partisan project. It should be a national mission. Whether Democrat, Republican, Independent, or otherwise, all Americans deserve a system that inspires confidence and ensures fairness.

President Trump has extended a hand by laying out comprehensive recommendations that prioritize transparency, fairness, and accountability. It is now the responsibility of lawmakers, state officials, and voters to engage with these reforms honestly. This is not about political victory—it's about national integrity.

## THE ROAD AHEAD: A NEW STANDARD FOR DEMOCRACY

If implemented in full, the Executive Order would transform the American electoral process into a global benchmark of transparency, speed, and reliability. A system where vote counting is immediate, secure, and beyond reproach. A system where voters know their ballots matter and election outcomes are respected—regardless of which side wins. The reforms also future-proof the process against emerging threats, from cyber interference to demographic manipulation. With biometric ID, disconnected machines, and real-time audits, the risk of disruption diminishes dramatically.

President Trump's Executive Order on election integrity is not just another policy document—it is a clarion call for democratic renewal. It invites the nation to shed complacency, confront reality, and adopt solutions that are already working around the world.

America's strength has always come from its willingness to improve. This initiative is a testament to that spirit. It acknowledges the flaws in the current system but also provides the tools to fix them. It asks not for blind loyalty, but for patriotic cooperation. Let us welcome this initiative not with partisanship, but with purpose. Let us elevate our standards, embrace transparency, and ensure that in every election, the will of the people—not the flaws of the system—prevails. The time for action is now. The world is watching. And the future of American democracy depends on it.

(Prof. Indrajit S Saluja is the chief editor of The Indian Panorama. He can be reached at salujaindra@gmail.com)

# The Indian judiciary is 'between a rock and hard place' moment

SOLUTIONS TO ADDRESS THE KEY ISSUES OF MISCONDUCT AND CORRUPTION AND APPOINTMENTS EXIST, WHILE ALSO KEEPING THE INDEPENDENCE OF THE JUDICIARY INTACT



By Prashant Bhushan

The facts in the Justice Yashwant Varma case are indeed disturbing. In an apparent accidental fire in an outhouse on the premises of his official bungalow in New Delhi (while he was not in town), the fire department seemed to have found several sacks of high value currency notes (₹500), which had been burnt, some partially. Someone in the police/fire department recorded a video when the firemen were trying to douse the fire.

The next evening, the Delhi police chief reported the incident to the Chief Justice of the Delhi High Court, where Justice Varma is a senior judge. This was then conveyed to the Chief Justice of India (CJI), who convened a meeting of the Collegium. A decision was taken to repatriate Justice Varma back to his parent court, the High Court of Allahabad. Justice Varma's response was also sought where he denied that any money had been stored in that room and even suggested that it might be a conspiracy against him.

However, when the news of the incident spread, it caused such a public furor that the CJI convened other meetings of the Collegium and decided to institute an in-house inquiry conducted by a three-judge committee which included two Chief Justices of the High Court of Himachal Pradesh and Punjab and Haryana, and a lady judge from the Karnataka High Court. The CJI also sought the call records of Justice Varma as well as those of his staff for the last six months. The CJI decided to release all the information related to the incident in the public domain, which included the video of the currency notes being found. These steps were indeed a case of welcome transparency. The CJI thereafter advised the Chief Justice of the Delhi High Court not to assign any judicial work to Justice Varma till such time as the inquiry is completed. Though Justice Varma's explanation does not appear to be very credible, one should still await the findings of the inquiry committee. There is no doubt that the report of the committee will shed light on what really happened.

## A TRIGGERING OF THE GOVERNMENT

The public furor that erupted has enabled the government to fish in the troubled waters of the judiciary, and the government is now using this incident to try and retake control of the power of appointing judges. To this end, the Vice-President of India (and the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha) has invited political leaders from the government and the Opposition to discuss why the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) Act, which was struck down by the Supreme Court of India as violative of the basic structure of the Constitution, should not be brought



back. The NJAC Act essentially formed an appointment committee comprising the CJI, two senior judges of the Court, the Union Law Minister and two eminent persons to be nominated by a committee comprising the CJI, the Prime Minister of India and the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha. It also placed the secretariat of this commission with the Law Ministry. Seven judges of the Court held the view that this would provide substantial scope to the government to interfere with judicial appointments and that would erode the independence of the judiciary, which is part of the basic structure of the Constitution. Thus, despite the NJAC Act having been brought by way of a constitutional amendment, it was declared invalid by the Court.

## GOVERNMENT'S GAME PLAN

In the recent past, the Narendra Modi government has seriously interfered with the appointment of judges despite the law being that the power of selection is with the Collegium of the Supreme Court and that the government can only return the name of the judges selected by the Collegium once to the Collegium if it is dissatisfied. Thereafter, if the Collegium reiterates its choice, the government is left with no option but to notify the appointment. However, in recent years, the Modi government has stymied the selection of independent judges by the Collegium, by sitting on recommendations, sometimes for years, without any response, and without notifying the appointments. Even when it is forced to respond and it returns the names with objections, and thereafter, even after it is unanimously reiterated by the Collegium, it has still not notified the appointments of many judges who are considered 'inconvenient' to the government. At the same time, it is quick to notify the appointments of those judges that the government likes.

During these years, on several occasions, the Collegium appears to have bent backwards to appease the government by selecting some judges

who are favored by the government in order to get some of those that it has recommended, appointed. This has led to the appointment of many judges who are either committed to the government's Hindutva ideology or who are weak and unable to resist the diktats and wishes of the government. As a result of this, the independence of the judiciary has been substantially eroded in recent years.

Now, using the Justice Varma case, the government is seeking even greater control and say in the matter of appointments of judges. If the government succeeds in this attempt, it will no doubt erode the independence of the judiciary - already in a precarious state - even further. This government has been trampling on the fundamental rights of people, rampantly misusing the enforcement agencies and bulldozing the rule of law by using bulldozers. In these circumstances, it is essential for public opinion and the Opposition to see through the government's game plan and resist such an attempt. There is no doubt that the collegium system of the appointment of judges is far from perfect and that its lack of transparency and any proper criteria for selecting judges have led to much nepotism and improper appointments through the Collegium as well. However, the solution is not greater government control. The problem with the Collegium is that it comprises sitting judges who are very busy with their judicial work and have little time to devote to this task.

## APPOINTMENT OF JUDGES, ISSUE OF CORRUPTION

Every year, hundred judges of the High Court and the Supreme Court are to be selected. In any proper selection process, at least 1,000 candidates have to be examined for their relative merits and demerits. For this, the right criteria and method to judge people on those criteria should be devised. Unfortunately, this has not been done. The solution is to have a full-time judicial appointments commission, comprising retired judges and other eminent public men, who are

totally independent of the government, and with a secretariat under their control which would select judges in a transparent manner. This would be a much better solution to address the problem of the appointment of judges - and what the Campaign for Judicial Accountability & Judicial Reforms has been advocating for a long time. However, the particular problem highlighted by the Justice Varma case is the problem of corruption in the Indian judiciary, which also needs a solution. The Constitution only provided for impeachment as a method. But this method has not been found to be practical or desirable because it starts with the signatures of 100 Members of Parliament to begin with, and ends with a vote in both Houses of Parliament.

## MIXED BAG FOR SUPREME COURT COLLEGIUM IN JUDICIAL APPOINTMENTS

Both are political processes, which often get politicized by political parties. This is why no judge has ever been successfully impeached in the history of the country, despite public knowledge that there is much corruption in the higher judiciary. What we need is a high-powered and full-time judicial complaints commission comprising five men/women who are independent of the government as well the judiciary. This complaints commission can receive complaints against judges of the higher judiciary from people. If they feel that there is a prima facie case, they can have the matter investigated or hold the trial of the judge through another committee, much like the judges inquiry committee.

However, the commission should decide what needs to be done with that judge, and their decision should be final, subject to judicial review only in exceptional circumstances. These matters should not go to Parliament at all. This would address the problem of judicial misconduct and corruption to a substantial degree.

(Prashant Bhushan is a Public Interest Lawyer practicing before the Supreme Court of India)

'There is no doubt that the collegium system of the appointment of judges is far from perfect, but the solution is not greater government control' |



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**HEALTH IS WEALTH**

# 'We won't back down': Global leaders threaten backlash to Trump auto tariff

MARCH 27, 2025

**NEW YORK (TIP):** World leaders have denounced United States President Donald Trump for unveiling a new tariff measure, this time aimed at the automobile industry.

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney offered one of the most frank assessments, saying it signaled an end to the tight bonds his country and the US once enjoyed.

"We applaud the Trump administration for stepping up to end the free trade disaster that has devastated working-class communities for decades," UAW President Shawn Fain wrote in a statement.

He blamed free-trade accords for sending US manufacturing jobs to cheaper markets abroad.

"These tariffs are a major step in the right direction for autoworkers and blue-collar communities across the country, and it is now on the automakers, from the Big Three to Volkswagen and beyond, to bring back good union jobs to the US," Fain said.

But critics warn that the tariffs will not have an immediate effect on job creation for Americans, as it will take time to build new production lines in the US.

"Donald Trump says that this will help regenerate the car-building process in the United States," explained Al Jazeera correspondent Alan Fisher.

"But, of course, if anyone is going to build a plant, it is going to take two, three, maybe four years - beyond Trump's time in office."

Some industry experts even predicted that the burden of tariffs could grind car manufacturing to a halt.

Flavio Volpe, the president of Canada's Automotive



Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney announced that 'nothing is off the table' in retaliation to 25-percent car tariffs.

Parts Manufacturing Association, explained that nearly two million automobiles constructed in Canada are made for US car companies. Those Canadian factories, meanwhile, source half of their car parts and raw materials from the US.

Volpe said that serves as an illustration of how deeply intertwined the international car industry is.

"Anything that the White House is trying to do to Canadians is going to [be done] directly to the three biggest automotive enterprises that are based in the US," Volpe told Al Jazeera.

"The industry is likely to shut down on both sides of the border within a week," he added.

Since the 25-percent tariffs were announced, US

automaker General Motors has seen a sharp drop in its shares. It is considered one of the "Big Three" car manufacturers in the US, alongside Ford and Stellantis.

Trump has been teasing tariffs on automobile imports since the start of his second term as president.

In February, for instance, he told reporters at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida that the tariffs would "be in the neighborhood of 25 percent", but he would unveil them at a later date, to give manufacturers "a little bit of a chance" to adjust.

Media reports indicated that US carmakers were worried such tariffs would disrupt their business.

At an investor conference in February, Ford CEO Jim Farley said cross-border tariffs threatened to "blow a hole in the US industry" over the long term.

Already, US trading partners have been preparing to retaliate against the tariffs, heightening a spiraling trade war.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, for instance, said, "The US has chosen a path at whose end lie only losers, since tariffs and isolation hurt prosperity for everyone."

Carney likewise hinted at negative outcomes for the global economy - and a firm response from Canada.

"We will fight the US tariffs with retaliatory trade actions of our own that will have maximum impact in the United States and minimum impacts here in Canada," Carney said.

Let's be clear: We're all on the same page. We won't back down. We will respond forcefully. Nothing is off the table to defend our workers and our country." (Source: Al Jazeera)

## Hamdard Health Alliance Bridging Gaps, Building Futures; Expands Services with a Grand Celebration in Chicago

MARCH 24, 2025

**CHICAGO, IL (TIP):** In a momentous event attended by esteemed community members, city leaders, and healthcare advocates, Hamdard Health Alliance proudly unveiled its expanded healthcare services at its Rogers Park clinic. The event, marked by heartfelt speeches and an official ribbon cutting ceremony, showcased Hamdard's commitment to providing culturally responsive healthcare to underserved communities.

The celebration brought together local dignitaries, including Mayor Brandon Johnson, who lauded Hamdard's efforts in bridging healthcare disparities and addressing critical mental health needs. The Mayor, in his address, expressed deep gratitude to the Hamdard team and acknowledged the importance of ensuring accessible healthcare services for all.

Kiran Siddiqui, CEO of Hamdard Health Alliance, warmly welcomed attendees to the grand inauguration of the newly renovated Rogers Park clinic. Reflecting on the journey, she acknowledged the dedication and perseverance it took to complete the two-year renovation. "This project tested our patience and endurance, but today, we celebrate a space that will allow us to serve even more community members with comprehensive medical and mental health services," she stated. She emphasized the vital role of community health centers, noting that 1 in 9 Illinois residents and nearly 1.5 million people annually receive care at facilities like Hamdard. With a steadfast commitment to Hope, Help, and Healing, Siddiqui reaffirmed Hamdard's promise to provide quality, culturally competent healthcare to those in need.

Honorable Mayor Mr Brandon Johnson addressed the gathering, emphasizing the significance of mental health as a core priority of his administration. He spoke about the personal impact of mental health struggles within his own family, sharing the story of his older brother who battled untreated trauma and addiction. The Mayor praised Hamdard Health Alliance for its unwavering



The ceremonial ribbon cutting, symbolizing a new chapter of growth and service.

dedication to providing culturally competent mental health services, particularly for Chicago's immigrant communities.

"Hamdard's partnership with the Chicago Department of Public Health and Apna Ghar has demonstrated the power of collaboration in expanding behavioral health services," said Mayor Johnson. "This organization ensures that people receive the care they need in a way that respects their cultural identity. That is what makes Hamdard a cornerstone of our city's healthcare safety net."

The Mayor's speech also included a light-hearted moment, as he humorously noted his tour of the historic building's old elevator, a subtle yet effective reminder of the need for continued investment in healthcare infrastructure. Concluding his remarks, he expressed his commitment to supporting organizations like Hamdard in making Chicago a stronger and healthier place for all.

Adding to the spirit of unity, the event coincided with the Community Iftar & Rogers Park Open House, an evening designed to bring people together in the holy

month of Ramadan. Held on Thursday, March 20, 2025, at 1542 W Devon Ave, Chicago, IL, the gathering welcomed guests for an evening of reflection, appreciation, and celebration.

Attendees enjoyed a delicious Iftar meal at sunset, embracing the beauty of community and togetherness. The open house allowed visitors to explore Hamdard's newly updated facility and witness first-hand the impact of its mission. The event also highlighted various health and well-being programs, reinforcing the organization's commitment to holistic patient care.

With a strong focus on inclusivity, the event was more than just a meal; it was a celebration of unity, diversity, and giving back. Leaders and guests shared inspiring words, reinforcing the belief that healthcare and social services should remain accessible to all, regardless of background.

Hamdard Health Alliance: A Legacy of Empathy and Excellence: Founded in 1992 by Dr. Mohammad Hamid and the late Dr. Farzana Hamid, Hamdard Health Alliance was established to address the lack of mental health support for South Asian and Middle Eastern communities in Chicago. Over the past three decades, the organization has expanded its services to include primary healthcare, mental health support, domestic violence intervention, and various social services, ensuring that patients receive comprehensive care tailored to their cultural and linguistic needs.

Hamdard's commitment to healthcare accessibility is reflected in their multilingual staff, who collectively speak over 10 languages, allowing them to connect with patients on a deeper level. The organization's growth was further solidified in 2013 when it received Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) status, enabling it to broaden its services and strengthen its role as a medical home for many underserved individuals.

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

# Trump signs executive order to end collective bargaining at agencies involved with national security

MARCH 28, 2025

WASHINGTON, D.C. (TIP): The order, signed and announced late on Thursday, March 27, appears to touch most of the federal government

US President Donald Trump on Thursday moved to end collective bargaining with federal labor unions in agencies with national security missions across the federal government, citing authority granted to him under a 1978 law.

The order, signed without public fanfare and announced late on Thursday, appears to touch most of the federal government.

The affected agencies include the departments of state, defense, Veterans affairs, energy, health and



human services, treasury, justice and commerce and the part of homeland security responsible for border security.

Police and firefighters will continue to collectively bargain.

Trump said the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 gives him the authority to end collective bargaining with federal unions in these agencies because of their role in safeguarding national security.

US President Donald Trump on Thursday, March 27, moved to end collective bargaining with federal labor unions in agencies with national security missions across the federal government, citing authority granted to him under a 1978 law.

## International Women's Day Celebrated as Shakti Day in Houston

MARCH 8, 2025

HOUSTON, TX (TIP): Hindu Women of Greater Houston Area celebrated International Women's Day as Shakti Day, which brought together community leaders, public figures, professionals, scientists and other high achievers, to honor their achievements and contributions, under the theme "Invoking Shakti, Transforming Communities." The event underscored the vital role women play in driving social change, providing opportunities, and solving problems.

The day kicked off with a traditional opening by Achala Bapat, who performed Durga chanting and a Ganesh pooja to bless the proceedings. Emcee Megha Raja then set an inspiring tone, introducing the theme and guiding attendees through a dynamic lineup of activities. The event welcomed chief guests Carol McCutcheon, a renowned advocate for women's rights, Dr. Meenakshi Bhattacharjee, scientist and a leader in community empowerment, and Sangeeta Dua, a celebrated social entrepreneur. Their powerful speeches emphasized the importance of advancing gender equality and dismantling barriers for women across all sectors.

Attendees enjoyed a variety of interactive games, including a writing competition, visualization exercises, balloon challenges, and networking opportunities, all expertly led by Emcee Megha Raja. Five unique vendor booths added to the experience. The henna booth offered traditional henna art. The health booth provided health and wellness consultations for women. The eggless cake booth showcased a delicious selection of eggless cakes. A financial opportunity booth shared resources for women's financial independence. The Anupama Iyengar's Dance Academy booth featured dance performances and classes. Cultural performances were a highlight of the day, with Anupama Iyengar and her daughter delivering a mesmerizing dance representing forms of Shakti, symbolizing strength and



Participants at the Shakti Day in Houston

empowerment. Ashwini Themgere followed with a captivating performance embodying grace and resilience.

Carol McCutcheon, guest of honor for the event, said "I loved celebrating International Women's Day 2025 with such amazing women! Let us continue to commit to breaking down the barriers to equality around the globe and lifting each other up. When we empower women, we strengthen entire communities, families, and nations." Carol, who is serving her fourth term as a city council member, is running for the office of Mayor of Sugar Land.

Dr. Meenakshi Bhattacharjee, another guest of honor, said "I was happy to attend, and to feel the power of Nari Shakti around me. As I felt the take back was that every woman has a power within and we need to harness that energy and chase our dreams. I believe that unless you fly you don't know to what heights you can reach." Dr. Bhattacharjee is a pioneering scientist in biotechnology, and serves as executive director of Center for Applied Algal Research, Rice University. She has published over 250 scientific research papers.

The keynote speaker Sangeeta Dua

Kataria emphasized the significance of Hindu goddesses as repositories of cosmic power that manifest in various forms such as Durga, Saraswati, Lakshmi, and Kali- are manifestations of virtues and strengths that resonate with living experiences, struggles and achievements of women. Key points of her address included multifaceted roles that women play in all walks of life where there are opportunities to invoke the universal power of Shakti to meet the contemporary challenges. Giving an example to illustrate the point, she added that Goddess Durga inspires to confront adversity and struggle for justice. Contemporary political leaders such as Tulsi Gabbard, Giorgia Meloni and Claudia Sheinbaum reflect the divine feminine's spirit, illustrating that empowerment is a composite outcome where education, opportunity for public role and pursuit of justice are deeply connected to spiritual invocation of the cosmic power of Shakti. Her speech called for women to channel the energy of the goddesses, to pursue their passions, and collectively foster a world where women's strength is recognized and celebrated, ensuring that the cosmic power of these divine figures inspire future generations.

### A CALL FOR CONTINUED ADVOCACY

The event concluded with closing remarks from Megha Raja, the host and principal organizer, urging attendees to remain committed to building an inclusive and equitable society for women. She said, "Shakti Day is not just a celebration-it signifies a movement to uplift and empower women to transform communities by invoking the cosmic power of Shakti." She thanked the attendees and all female volunteer team of women who put together the inspiring program.

Shakti World program is dedicated to fostering gender equality and empowering women through community-driven programs, cultural events, and advocacy efforts.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT SHAKTI WORLD'S ONGOING INITIATIVES, PLEASE CONTACT:

Megha Raja, Coordinator  
Houston Chapter of Shaktiworld  
Tel. (351) 202-5059  
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More pics  
<https://photos.app.goo.gl/CqeTfMqmUeK4CpqDA>

# Lok Sabha clears Immigration Bill; Shah says India not a dharamshala

NEW DELHI (TIP)

The Lok Sabha passed the Immigration and Foreigners Bill, 2025, on Thursday, March 27, with Home Minister Amit Shah saying that those who come to India for business, education and investment are welcome, but those who pose a threat to security will face stringent action.

Shah said the government would not allow anyone who wished to disrupt peace enter the country.

"This country is not a dharamshala where anyone can come and reside. If someone comes by following the law and with an intention of developing both India and their home country, they are most welcome. But if it is a security threat, it is the right of Parliament to make a law to stop them," he said in Parliament while replying to a debate on the Bill.

The Bill, which seeks to regulate immigration, entry and stay of foreigners in India, was passed by a voice vote. It repeals the Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920, the Registration of Foreigners Act, 1939, the Foreigners Act, 1946, and the Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act, 2000.

During the discussion, Shah explained the features of the Bill and said it held significance for strengthening national security, ensuring global standards of Indian universities and building foundations for research and development, which would ultimately fulfil the dream of



a developed India by 2047.

"The earlier colonial laws were made by the British during a mad race for self-gratification between World War I and II, and for the protection of the British government. However, the new ones have been made keeping in mind India's welfare," Shah said.

The Home Minister compared the number of people entering and leaving the country with the time when the Congress was in power. "In 2014, 2.49 crore people came to India. In 2024, the figure stood at four crore. In total, the number of people arriving and leaving India in a year has drastically surged in the past decade by 59 per cent," Shah said.

The Home Minister said anyone who tried to enter India apart from notified ports and airports, be it land border or water border, would be called an "illegal

immigrant".

"If any foreign national has to come to India, it should be decided from which route he enters the country. We will notify it...One of the opposition members was saying why should we stop them? There could be some sensitive places like a military installation near our border, we can't throw them open to the world," Shah said.

The Home Minister said India had always acted with humanity and given refuge to those who had fled their home countries due to persecution. "Parsis fled Persia and came to India. The world's smallest 'micro-minority' community lives in India with respect. Even Jews fled Israel and stayed in India," Shah said.

The Home Minister said persecuted people from six communities from neighbouring countries were granted citizenship under the CAA.

"They infiltrated into India, but I will not call it infiltration. The ones who came to India to save their religion or save their families, I will not call them infiltrators but refugees. This is why we brought the CAA," Shah said.

He said anyone who comes to India to contribute to the country's economy, for business, education, R&D or to strengthen our legal system was welcome. "But I want to say with the same firmness that be it Rohingya or Bangladeshi, if they come here to disrupt peace, we will strictly deal with them," Shah said. *Source: TNS*



## Meerut Police warns against roadside prayers ahead of Eid, threatens passport revocation

Meerut Police on Thursday, March 27, issued strict warnings against 'unauthorised' roadside prayers, saying violators will face legal action that may lead to their passports getting cancelled and driving licences revoked. The directive comes ahead of Eid-ul-Fitr and last Friday prayers of Ramzan.

Superintendent of Police Ayush Vikram Singh told news agency PTI that no one should perform Namaz on the roads and Eid prayers should be offered at local mosques or at a designated Eidgah.

Ayush Vikram Singh said notices have been issued regarding the recent directive and warned that individuals violating it may have their passport and driving licence revoked. "Last year, some individuals defied the directives and prayed on the roads, leading to action against more than 80 people. This time, anyone violating the rule will face strict legal action," he added.

"If criminal cases are registered against individuals, their passports and licenses can be cancelled, and obtaining a new passport would become difficult without a No Objection Certificate (NOC) from the court. Such documents remain confiscated until the individuals are cleared by the court," Singh explained.

Union minister and RLD chief Jayant Chaudhary reacted to Meerut police's directive in a post on X: "Policing towards Orwellian 1984!" he wrote. In his iconic novel "Nineteen Eighty-Four", George Orwell talks about law enforcers or Thought Police who have immense powers.

Meerut SSP Vipin Tada said that security agencies are coordinating with the district administration to ensure a "peaceful celebration."

Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) and Rapid Action Force (RAF) personnel have been deployed, and flag marches are being conducted in "sensitive areas," he said. Uniformed and plainclothes officers will also be stationed at all sensitive locations.

"Strict action will be taken against those trying to spread rumours or incite unrest through social media. We are keeping a close watch on social media platforms, and any attempt to disrupt communal harmony will be dealt with firmly," the SSP said.

## LoP being denied opportunity to speak in Lok Sabha, Opposition writes to Birla

NEW DELHI (TIP)

A day after Leader of Opposition (LoP) Rahul Gandhi said he was being "denied" the opportunity to speak in Parliament, a delegation of Opposition parties' met Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on Thursday, March 27, to raise the matter with him.

Birla on Wednesday asked Gandhi to conduct himself in line with the rules of procedure that the members were expected to observe to uphold the dignity of the House. The LoP claimed that the remarks against him were "unsubstantiated".

Birla did not specify the trigger behind censuring Gandhi, who was present in the House and wanted to speak on some issue. He adjourned the proceedings after making his point.

Congress's deputy leader in the Lok Sabha Gaurav Gogoi said the INDIA bloc delegation, comprising the Congress, SP, TMC, DMK, Kerala Congress, RJD, IUML, RLP and MDMK, met the Speaker during the zero hour.

"We have given a letter, which was signed by many parties, conveying our collective concern and disappointment



on how the ruling side is violating the traditions, rules and culture of the House," Gogoi told reporters after the meeting.

Gogoi said yesterday there was no clarity from the Speaker's side when he made comments against LoP Rahul Gandhi. "When the LoP stood up, the House was adjourned. He was not allowed to speak, despite his name being taken in the House. The whole country saw it. LoP is a constitutional post. Remarks were made about him, but he was not allowed to speak. There was no clarity on what incident the speaker was referring to when he made a reference to Rule 349, but the BJP's IT cell was politicising the issue," he said.

The convention of allowing the LoP to

speak when they stand up has been disregarded repeatedly. This breaks from past parliamentary practices and diminishes the space for a healthy debate in the House, the Congress leader said.

"A well-functioning democracy requires the smooth operation of Parliament, where all members, irrespective of party affiliation, are given an equal opportunity to debate, deliberate and discharge their constitutional duties. However, certain disturbing trends have emerged, which undermine the sanctity of Parliament," the Opposition leaders have mentioned in the letter.

The Opposition has also raised the issue of "non-appointment" of a deputy speaker in the Lok Sabha.

Citing Article 93 of the Constitution, which mandates the election of the speaker and a deputy speaker in the Lok Sabha, the opposition leaders pointed out in their letter to Birla that the deputy speaker's post has been vacant since 2019. The absence of a deputy speaker sets a dangerous precedent, affecting the neutrality and functioning of the House, the letter stated.

## Dallewal breaks fast as farmers' protests ease at borders

Farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal, who had been on a hunger strike since November 26, 2024, demanding systemic agricultural reforms and legal guarantees for Minimum Support Price (MSP), ended his fast on Friday, March 28. During a hearing related to the blockade at Punjab-Haryana border points, the Punjab government informed the Supreme Court that Dallewal, leader of the SKM (Non-Political), had accepted water.

The bench welcomed the development.

"This is good news. We have always maintained that he is a true farmer leader and has the best interests of the farming community at heart," remarked justice Kant. Farmers, led by Dallewal under the banners of Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha, had been protesting along the Punjab-Haryana border since February 2024, demanding systemic agricultural reforms, legal guarantees for MSP, and debt relief, among other measures.

# 'Now, it's our turn': Putin accepts Modi's invitation to visit India

NEW DELHI (TIP)

Russian Foreign Affairs Minister Sergey Lavrov has confirmed that President Vladimir Putin would visit India.

Lavrov said, "PM Narendra Modi made his first bilateral foreign visit to Russia after his re-election last year. Now, it is our turn. President Putin has accepted the Indian invite."

He was addressing a conference, "Russia and India: Towards a New Bilateral Agenda", through a video message. The event is being conducted in Moscow.

Lavrov said Russia and India were aiming to take their bilateral ties to an all-time high, and for this, Putin would visit India soon. He said, "Our relations have a solid material base. Trade and economic cooperation are steadily expanding..." "Arrangements are being made for Putin's visit to India," he said. However, he did not specify the month or date when the visit would take place.

During his visit to Russia last year, Modi had invited the Russian President for an official state visit. This will be Putin's first visit to India since the war in Ukraine broke out in February 2022. The visit is expected to take forward Putin's "new economic roadmap" for 2030. India and Russia have agreed to double their bilateral trade to over \$100 billion annually.

Meanwhile, addressing the conference through a video message, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said India was looking at "further enhancement" of its ties with Russia and the strategic partnership between the two nations remained a shared foreign policy priority.



Jaishankar highlighted the "resilience of the bond" between the two nations, saying it was based on the "deep historical roots" and a "long tradition of trust and mutual respect".

## 'Satire makes life more meaningful': SC on freedom of speech; quashes case against Congress MP

NEW DELHI (TIP)

Amid row over comedian Kunal Kamra's Eknath Shinde joke, Supreme Court on Friday, March 28, said literature, including poetry, drama, films, satire, and art make life of human beings more meaningful and quashed an FIR lodged by Gujarat Police against Congress MP Imran Pratapgarhi in 'provocative' song case.

A bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan emphasised that protecting citizens' fundamental rights is the court's duty, particularly when it comes to freedom of speech and expression.

While the observation of the Supreme Court was made during the hearing of Congress MP Imran Pratapgarhi's case, it comes amid a massive controversy and debates over the lengths of freedom of speech over comedian Kunal Kamra's satirical stand-up act on Maharashtra deputy chief minister Eknath Shinde.

"Even if a large number of persons dislike the views expressed by another, the right of person to express the views must be respected and protected. Literature, including poetry, drama, films, satire and art, make the life of human beings more meaningful," the bench said.

Pratapgarhi, the national chairman of Congress' minority cell, had challenged the January 17 order of the Gujarat high



court, which dismissed his petition seeking to quash the FIR. The Gujarat high court had ruled that the investigation was still at an early stage.

On January 3, Pratapgarhi was booked for allegedly sharing a provocative song in connection with a mass marriage function he attended in Jamnagar. The FIR included multiple sections, including Section 196 (promoting enmity between different groups based on religion, race, etc.) and Section 197 (imputations, assertions prejudicial to national integration) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita.

The 46-second video clip uploaded by Pratapgarhi on X showed him walking and waving his hands as flower petals rained down on him, with a song playing in the background. The FIR claimed the song's lyrics were provocative, detrimental to national unity, and offensive to religious sentiments.

## Kunal Kamra files pre-arrest bail plea amid row over Eknath Shinde 'traitor' joke

NEW DELHI (TIP)

Comedian Kunal Kamra on Friday, March 28, approached the Madras High Court to seek interim protection from pre-arrest in connection with the FIR filed against him in Mumbai over his alleged "traitor" jibe at Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde.

The comedian, a resident of Tamil Nadu's Villupuram, applied for transit anticipatory bail, which allows an accused to seek pre-arrest bail in their home state even if the FIR is lodged elsewhere.

In this case, Kamra has moved the Madras High Court, which holds jurisdiction, as he claims to be a resident of Tamil Nadu.

Kunal Kamra's legal counsel further told the Madras High Court that he would be arrested upon his return to Mumbai and has been receiving death threats from Shiv Sena cadres following his stand-up act.

The matter has been mentioned for an urgent hearing before the Chief Justice's bench. The court is scheduled to hear the case at around 2:15 PM.

A zero FIR was lodged in Mumbai under several provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), including Sections 353(1)(b), 353(2) (public mischief) and 356(2) (defamation) based on a complaint filed by Shiv Sena



legislator Muraji Patel.

Angered by Kamra's veiled dig at Shinde last week, Shiv Sena workers vandalised Mumbai's Habitat Studio, where the comedian had mocked Maharashtra's Deputy Chief Minister.

Twelve people were arrested in connection with the incident; however, they were soon released on bail. Kunal Kamra has already been served two summonses from the Khar Police Station in Mumbai, as the cops rejected his request for more time.

Amid a series of FIRs, a defiant Kamra said that he would not apologise for exercising his freedom of speech and expression. "As far as I know, it is not against the law to poke fun at our leaders and the circus that is our political system," he said.

# India in history this Week

## MARCH 28 TO APRIL 3

### 28 MARCH

1941 Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose escaped from detention and reached Berlin.

1977 Morarji Desai formed the government in India in 1977.

2000 West Indies' Courtney Walls broke Kapil Dev's record 435 wickets.

2013 The Internet's biggest attack on history.



2015 Saina Nehwal became the world's number one female badminton player.

### 29 MARCH

1857 Soldier Mangal Pandey became known as a freedom fighter in the Bengal Native Infantry revolts against the British rule in India and the long-running 1857 Sepoy Freedom Struggle.

1943 Laxman Nayak, a freedom fighter and leader, was hanged in Barhampur jail.

1954 The Indian Institute of Public Administration was inaugurated.

1982 Telugu Desam Party Formed in 1982 by T. Rama Rao.



1999 Nearly 90 people died in the 1999 Himalayan earthquake in the foothills of the Himalayas.

2008 370 cities of the world started celebrating Earth Hour in 2008 for the first time to save energy.

1913 Famous Hindi poet and writer Bhavani Prasad was born on this day.



### 30 MARCH

1919 Mahatma Gandhi announced his opposition to the Rowlatt Act.

1949 The state of Rajasthan was established in 1949 and Jaipur was made its capital.

1977 Swami Agnivesh merged his Bharatiya Arya Sabha Party with the Janata Party in 1977.



1932 Regal Cinema Hall, one of the famous and old cinema halls of Delhi since 1932, was closed in 2017.

1899 In 1899, Cyril Radcliffe, who drew the line of the India-Pakistan divide, was born.

1664 Guru Har Kishan Singh, the eighth Guru of the Sikhs, died on this day in 1664.

### 31 MARCH



1959 The Buddhist leader Dalai Lama was granted asylum in India after his exile from Tibet.

1964 Electric tram last run in Bombay.

1774 The first post of the Postal Service opened in India in 1774.

1867 Praya Samaj was established in 1867 in Mumbai.

2011 According to census data, India's population has increased to 121 crore (1 billion 21 crore) in 2011. This is 17.64% more than what was calculated ten years ago.

1504 The second Sikh Guru Guru Angad Dev was born.

1865 India's first female doctor Anandi Gopal Joshi was born.

### 01 APRIL

1935 The Reserve Bank of India started functioning from 1 April 1935. For this, the British made the Reserve Bank of India Act 1934 law.

1839 Kolkata Medical College and Hospital was started in 1839.

1878 The new museum building in Kolkata was opened to the public in 1878.

1912 Delhi was declared the capital and a province of India.

1936 Odisha was carved out of Bihar and created a

new state in 1936.

1969 India's first nuclear power station started in the Tarapur region of Maharashtra in 1969.



1973 The 'Tiger Bachao' campaign was launched in 1973 to save cheetahs in India's Corbett National Park.

1976 Doordarshan Corporation was established in 1976 by separating Doordarshan from radio.

1992 The Eighth Five Year Plan started in 1992.

1621 Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Guru of the Sikhs, was born in 1621.

### 02 APRIL

1849 British Punjab was established in 1849.

1942 The Congress rejected the proposal of the Cripps Mission in 1942.

1984 Astronaut Rakesh Sharma became the first Indian astronaut to go to space under the Mission Soyuz T-11 in 1984.



1997 Sumita Sinha set a record in 1997 by allowing her to cross over 3200 kg of trucks.

1983 India won the World Cup for the second time on the same day in 2011, after winning the first World Cup in 1983.

2017 In 2017, Prime Minister Narendra Modi dedicated the country's longest, Chenani-Nashri road tunnel in Jammu and Kashmir to the nation.

1902 Classical singer Bade Ghulam Ali Khan was born in 1902.

### 03 APRIL

1680 Death of Chhatrapati Shivaji, who laid the foundation of Maratha empire in western India, in Raigarh.

2007 14th SAARC Conference begins in New Delhi.

2010 Apple's first iPad arrived in the market.

1933 The plane first flew in 1933 over Mount Everest, the world's highest peak.

1999 India launched the first global telecommunications satellite INSAT 1E in 1999.

2016 West Indies won the ICC Twenty20 World Cup by defeating England in 2016 at the Eden Gardens ground in Kolkata.



# Will Canada's federal polls in April end the era of minority governments?



----> By Prabhjot Singh

MARCH 27, 2025

**TORONTO (TIP):** After Justin Trudeau decided to step down as leader of the ruling (though minority) Liberal Party and Prime Minister, Canada decided to go for a snap poll. On the recommendation of Mark Carney, the Governor-General ordered the next federal elections to be held on April 28 in a bid to end the impasse of minority governments in the country.

Canada already had 13 such minority governments in a little more than the last 100 years. The incumbent Liberal government, incidentally, had the longest tenure in office. In the current centennial, it was Paul Martin (Liberals), who presided over a minority government from 2004 to 2006, followed by another minority government between 2006 and 2008, led this time by the Conservative leader Stephen Harper. Stephen Harper headed his second minority government between 2008 and 2011. Since 2019, the present minority Liberal government has been in office.

Besides fighting a tough "tariff" war with its big brother and largest trade partner, the US, Canada is witnessing an interesting ideological war that will determine its political future. The new Prime Minister, Mark, faces the arduous task of leading the Liberals in the battle of political survival with the Conservatives breathing heavily down their necks. Though in the outgoing House of Commons, the Liberals, after earning the distinction of heading the longest-serving minority government in the country, had 153 members, it now wants to browse the majority target of 170, in the House of 337.



Canada's Prime Minister Mark Carney

Conservatives (120), Bloc Québécois (33), NDP (25), Independent (4), and Green (2) were the other major players in the dissolved House. After taking over from where Justin Trudeau left, Mark Carney, a financial wizard, promised, set upon himself the arduous task of restructuring the Canadian economy that has been on the brink ever since Donald Trump, after taking command for the second innings, rolling out new policies and "tariff" plans that are proving detrimental to Canada in general and its manufacturers and exporters in particular.

After wresting the initial advantage that saw a steep rise in its popularity in opinion polls, the Liberals have started showing signs of cracking under pressure from the Conservatives, and in their desperation to surge ahead, have unleashed a powerful campaign attacking

Mark Carney for shirking to make his asset disclosures and other issues. Mark Carney has also made some announcements to woo the voters, including relief for domestic consumers on the carbon fund, besides a slew of other benefits. The battle lines have been drawn for a rare battle of the ballot in April. Technically speaking, the election becomes due in October. The new Prime Minister, facing his first-ever electoral test, has decided to contest from Nepean in Ottawa after revoking the candidature of sitting MP Chandra Arya, who was incidentally among the first to declare his candidature and get rejected in the Liberal Party leadership race. Now, he has lost his riding to the new Prime Minister. Ruby Dhalla, like Chandra Arya, who was also a candidate in the Liberal Leadership run, came out in support of Chandra Arya after the revocation of his candidature.

Ruby Dhalla, a former Liberal MP, and Chandra Arya were the only candidates of Indian origin in the run to become Canadian Prime Minister. Both were disqualified on technical grounds by the election and expense committees of the Liberal Party. Ruby Dhalla's protest was rejected as she accused the party leadership of creating a "sham" for electing a new leader, as she maintained that it was all planned for the "coronation of Mark Carney". What Canadian voters have to say about their political future will be known by the evening of April 28 when results of the next federal elections start pouring in.

(Prabhjot Singh is a Toronto-based senior journalist. He can be reached at Prabhjot416@gmail.com)

## Canada intel agency says India, China intend to meddle in poll: 'Hostile state actors will use AI'

MARCH 27, 2025

**OTTAWA (TIP):** China and India are likely to try to interfere in the Canadian general election on April 28, while Russia and Pakistan have the potential to do so, the country's spy service said on Monday, March 24

The Canadian Security Intelligence Service made its comments at a time when Ottawa's relations with both

India and China are chilly. Beijing and New Delhi have denied previous allegations of interference.

Canada was slow in responding to efforts by China and India to interfere in the 2019 and 2021 elections but their outcomes were unaffected by the meddling, an official probe concluded in a final report released in January. Vanessa Lloyd, deputy director of operations at CSIS, told a press conference that hostile state actors were increasingly leveraging artificial intelligence to meddle in elections.

"The PRC (People's Republic of China) is highly likely to use AI enabled tools to attempt to interfere with Canada's democratic process in this current election," she said.

The Indian diplomatic mission in Ottawa was not immediately available for comment.

Russia and Pakistan could potentially conduct foreign interference activities against Canada, Lloyd added.

"It's often very difficult to establish a direct link between foreign interference activities and election results ... Nevertheless, threat activities can erode public trust in the integrity of Canada's democratic processes and institutions," she said.

Meanwhile, quoting unnamed sources, The Globe and Mail alleged Tuesday, March 25, that agents of India and their proxies meddled in the 2022 election of Pierre Poilievre, a Conservative Party leader.

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

## India takes center stage ahead of Canada's federal elections on April 28

MARCH 27, 2025

**TORONTO (TIP):** With federal elections in Canada scheduled for April 28, the intersection of domestic politics and Indian influence is once again at the forefront. Recent controversies surrounding Chandra Arya, an Indian-origin MP from Nepean, and Conservative Party leader Pierre Poilievre highlight the complex dynamics of Canada's relations with India, diaspora politics, and national security concerns.



Chandra Arya, Canadian MP of Indian origin  
File photo

Chandra Arya's political trajectory has been notably turbulent in 2025. After announcing his candidacy for the Liberal Party leadership following Justin Trudeau's decision to step down, Arya faced rejection from the party's election committee. Citing Section 4(c)iii of the Liberal Party's national leadership rules, the committee deemed him "manifestly unfit for the office of Leader of the Party." Though specific reasons were not disclosed, speculations pointed towards his outspoken stance against Khalistani extremism, and his perceived connections with India and Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Arya's subsequent removal from candidacy for re-election in Nepean further fueled debates about the party's internal policies and its handling of sensitive international affiliations.

Arya, who has represented the Nepean riding in Ottawa since 2015, suffered another setback earlier this month when his nomination to re-run from the riding was revoked. He shared this information on social media along with the letter he had received from the Liberal Party's national campaign director, Andrew Bevan.

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



By Raveen Thukral

## Indian-origin woman attacked on crowded railway platform in Canada, video goes viral



The woman was standing on the south side of the Third Street S.E. CTrain station, located at 310C Seventh Ave. S.E. when she was brutally attacked by a man, who has since been arrested

Credit: Videogram Instagram@thecanadapunjabi

MARCH 27, 2025

**CALGARY (TIP):** A disturbing video of an Indian-origin woman being brutally attacked on a crowded railway platform in Calgary, Canada, has gone viral. The woman was standing on the south side of the Third Street S.E. CTrain station, located at 310C Seventh Ave. S.E., confirmed the Calgary Police in their X post.

The footage shows the man grabbing the woman's jacket and repeatedly shaking her. He then grabbed her water bottle, splashed water on her face, slammed her into the transit shelter walls and demanded her to give him her phone.

He fled the scene without the phone allowing the woman to call the police.

"Thanks to the support of witnesses in the area & to the swift actions of our members, we were able to make an arrest within 25 minutes of this incident," says Calgary Police Service District 1 Inspector Jason Bobrowich.

The man has been identified as Braydon Joseph James French. The video has gone viral and sparked outrage and allegations of racism.

# Embassy of India in Guatemala Celebrates Holi- the Festival of Colors

## GUATEMALANS JOIN ENTHUSIASTICALLY



Ambassador Dr. Manoj Kumar Mohapatra shared his thoughts with the participants in Holi.

**MARCH 23, 2025**

**GUATEMALA CITY (TIP):** The Embassy of India in Guatemala celebrated the festival of Holi with great enthusiasm and cultural vibrancy on March 8, 2025, in Guatemala City, and on March 22, 2025, in San Salvador. The celebration in Guatemala City witnessed an overwhelming response, with approximately 500 guests in attendance, including members of the Indian diaspora, Guatemalan dignitaries, friends of India, and local community members. Similarly, Holi festival in San Salvador, organized in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture, the Municipality of San Salvador and Mitrata Association, attracted much higher number of guests of approx. 1000, showcasing the widespread enthusiasm for Indian cultural festivities



Holi celebrations in Guatemala City

in the region.

The Embassy plays a crucial role in fostering cultural exchange and enhancing India's image abroad by organizing such cultural events. These festivals serve as a bridge to bring together diverse communities and help promote Indian heritage in Central America. The Embassy's cultural initiatives have included the successful celebration of Diwali, attended by approximately 1,500 people in 2023 and approx. 1000 in 2024, including local dignitaries, Indian community members, and friends of India. Similarly, the Holi festival attracted around 500 participants who came together to enjoy the colors and festivities in 2024.

These efforts contribute to strengthening the cultural bonds and understanding between India and the host nations.



Participants enjoying colorful Holi in Guatemala City

This year, the Holi celebrations commenced with an address by Ambassador Dr. Manoj Kumar Mohapatra, who warmly welcomed all attendees and set the tone for the festivities. In his speech, he emphasized the profound cultural and social significance of Holi, describing it as a festival that transcends boundaries and fosters a spirit of unity, harmony, and joy. He elaborated on how Holi symbolizes the victory of good over evil, the arrival of spring, and the renewal of relationships through the vibrant tradition of playing with colors. Ambassador Mohapatra also highlighted how Indian festivals, including Holi, serve as a bridge between diverse cultures, bringing people together in an atmosphere of celebration and camaraderie. He expressed appreciation for the increasing enthusiasm among Guatemalans and Salvadorans toward Indian traditions, noting that such shared cultural experiences strengthen the bonds between India and the host nations. He extended his gratitude to all the guests, including members of the Indian diaspora, local dignitaries, and friends of India, for their participation. Despite their busy schedules, their presence and enthusiasm reflected the universal appeal of Holi and underscored the festival's role in promoting intercultural exchange and global friendship.

Although the presence of the Indian community in Central American countries remains relatively limited, the overwhelming participation of Guatemalans and Salvadorans in the Holi celebrations at both locations was a testament to the growing appreciation and acceptance of Indian culture and traditions in the region. Guests enjoyed traditional Indian music, dance performances, and Holi-themed cultural presentations. The highlight of the event was the playful application of colors, where attendees enthusiastically participated, embracing the festive spirit. To enhance the experience, Indian delicacies and sweets were available by Indian restaurants, viz Little India and Curry & Kebab, allowing guests to savor authentic flavors of India. The enthusiastic response from the local communities highlighted the deepening cultural connection between India and Central America, showcasing how Indian heritage is gradually making its mark in this part of the world.

The Mission, under the able guidance of Ambassador



Celebrating the vibrant festival of Holi in El Salvador - spreading the message of unity, joy, and the rich cultural heritage of India

Dr. Manoj Kumar Mohapatra, has actively worked towards strengthening cultural and diplomatic ties of India with Guatemala, Honduras and Salvador. Through a series of well-planned initiatives, including grand celebrations of Indian festivals and outreach programs like the International Day of Yoga, the Embassy has significantly expanded India's cultural footprint in the region. In addition to these celebrations, the Embassy has also undertaken initiatives such as the Indian Film Festival 2024-25, which featured screenings of several Indian films across different locations. These efforts have not only introduced the rich diversity of Indian traditions to the local population but have also created a strong emotional and cultural resonance among them. As a result of these outreach initiatives, there has been a noticeable surge in interest among Guatemalans, Honduran and Salvadorans in visiting India-whether



Bringing the magic of Indian colors and Bollywood to El Salvador

**CONTD ON PAGE 19**

# India's Ambassador to Guatemala Interacts with Students and Faculty of San Carlos University



Ambassador Dr. Manoj Kumar Mohapatra had an engaging interactive session with students and faculty of San Carlos University



During the interactive workshop with students & faculty of San Carlos University Ambassador Dr. Manoj Kumar Mohapatra promoted the International Year of Cooperatives 2025.

**MARCH 20, 2025**

**GUATEMALA CITY (TIP):** The Embassy of India in Guatemala has been consistently working towards promoting Indian trade, commerce, and cultural ties in Guatemala and the broader Central American region. In recent years, the Embassy has organized numerous Business-to-Business (B2B) meetings, Business Meets, and Buyer-Seller Meets (BSMs) with various stakeholders across Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. These initiatives have not only facilitated stronger trade partnerships but also showcased India's dynamic economic potential. With India's growing presence on the world stage and rising popularity in Central America, especially due to the successful organization of large-scale cultural events like Diwali, Holi, Indian Film Festivals and the International Day of Yoga, educational institutions, including schools and universities, have expressed keen interest in learning more about India. Recognizing this curiosity and the geographical distance between the two countries, the Embassy decided to initiate interactive sessions aimed at young minds. In this context, a special workshop was organized at San Carlos University on 18 March 2025, which saw the participation of around 100 attendees, including 85 enthusiastic students and faculty members.

2. During the interactive session,

Ambassador Dr. Manoj Kumar Mohapatra spoke in detail about India's remarkable development journey, highlighting how India has emerged as one of the fastest-growing economies in the world and is on track to become the third-largest economy globally in the coming years. He elaborated on India's robust economic policies, large skilled workforce, and the technological innovation driving the nation forward. Ambassador touched upon India's significant trade relations with Guatemala, with particular emphasis on sectors like pharmaceuticals, the BPO industry, textiles, and automobiles. He shared insights into how Indian pharmaceutical companies are leading the way, positioning India as the "pharmacy of the world," with exports reaching over 200 countries and ensuring affordable healthcare solutions globally.

3. Continuing his address, Ambassador further highlighted India's growing investments in large infrastructure projects, including constructions of metro lines, supply of buses, solar power stations, cable cars, renewable energy, 5G technology, early warning system and smart city initiatives in the Central American region, which have not only transformed India domestically but also opened avenues for international collaboration. In the context of Central America, he

pointed out India's increasing role as a reliable trade partner and contributor to development projects. Ambassador Dr. Mohapatra emphasized the importance of leveraging the India-Guatemala relationship, pointing out that Indian products and services, known for their quality and affordability, could greatly benefit the Guatemalan market. He also mentioned India's successful digital revolution and how it could serve as a model for innovation and technology transfer for countries like Guatemala.

4. The faculty members of San Carlos University expressed their appreciation for the Embassy's initiative in organizing such an informative and interactive workshop. In their remarks, they highlighted that such engagements play a pivotal role in shaping the worldview of young students and broadening their understanding of emerging economies like India. They noted that Guatemala's youth are increasingly looking towards global opportunities and that learning about India's growth story, technological advancement, and vibrant culture offers them inspiration and potential avenues for collaboration, both academically and professionally.

5. During the interactive session, students posed several thoughtful and insightful questions to Ambassador Mohapatra. They showed keen interest in understanding the factors behind

India's rapid economic rise, the government's policies on youth empowerment and skill development, and how India has balanced its ancient traditions with modern technological progress. Many students also inquired about India's cultural diversity, the popularity of Bollywood, yoga, and Indian cuisine. Questions were raised about how Guatemala could benefit from stronger ties with India, with students eager to explore opportunities in education, cultural exchange, and trade partnerships. Some also expressed interest in future collaborations for scholarships, internships, and participation in India-based programs like ITEC and ICCR.

6. The workshop concluded with a vote of thanks from the university administration, expressing gratitude to the Embassy of India for providing students with a deeper understanding of India's global role and its potential as a strong partner for Guatemala. The Embassy reiterated its commitment to continuing such interactions and building closer ties between the youth of both countries. The event successfully opened new avenues of dialogue, leaving students and faculty inspired by India's story of growth, resilience, and global outreach.

(Based on a press release issued by Ramesh Khulbey)

**CONTD FROM PAGE 18**

## Embassy of India in Guatemala Celebrates Holi- the Festival of Colors

for tourism, educational programs such as the ITEC courses, or business opportunities.

The Holi celebrations at the Embassy of India in Guatemala and El Salvador were a resounding success, bringing together people from different backgrounds to experience and appreciate India's cultural richness. The exposure to Indian culture through these events has sparked curiosity and admiration, encouraging more people to explore India's historical, spiritual, and economic landscape. Additionally, the local population has shown increasing enthusiasm for learning more about India, its traditions, and its global contributions, paving the way for stronger people-to-people ties and deeper cultural engagement in the future.

(Based on a press release issued by Ramesh Khulbey)



Colors of India brightening El Salvador! Holi celebrations bringing communities together in friendship and happiness.

# COMEDIAN KRISTIN KEY JOKES WITH A MUSICAL TWIST

BY MABEL PAIS

Armed with her trusty guitar, superstar comedian Kristin Key tells jokes and stories with a musical twist.

Her 'Lesbian National Anthem' was a viral sensation, along with her brilliant DryBar comedy special *Crafty*. She hosts the podcast 'Kristin Knows Blank,' and she's appeared on NBC's 'Bring the Funny' and 'Last Comic Standing.' Using comedy as a way to uplift her



Kristin Key

Credit : NJPAC.org

*all walks of life, Kristin donates to local nonprofits with every date on her 'Lesbian Army Tour.' More than a fandom, this is a movement!*

## TICKETS

For tickets to watch Kristin Key, visit [NJPAC.org](http://NJPAC.org) or the NJPAC Box Office or call 888. GO.NJPAC (888.466.5722).

community and create safe spaces for comedy fans from

# FEAST YOUR EYES ON SHUSHI ARMENIAN DANCE

BY MABEL PAIS

Don't miss this spectacular event!

After a very successful 30th anniversary performance at NJPAC in November 2022 with over 2,000 in attendance, Shushi Armenian Dance Ensemble of St. Vartan Cathedral in NYC will return to Prudential Hall with talented artists from Armenia, Australia and California. This exhilarating song and dance performance, RESILIENCE & HOPE, will feature over 100 performers.

## TICKETS

For tickets to watch Shushi Armenian Dance, visit [NJPAC.org](http://NJPAC.org) or the NJPAC Box Office or call 888. GO.NJPAC (888.466.5722).

The New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC)

## FOLLOW NJPAC ONLINE:

Website: [njpac.org](http://njpac.org)



Shushi Armenian Dance Ensemble

Credit : NJPAC.org

Twitter: @NJPAC  
Instagram: @NJPAC  
Hashtag: #NJPAC  
Facebook: [facebook.com/NJPAC](https://facebook.com/NJPAC)  
YouTube: NJPACtv

Follow NJPAC's Standing in Solidarity Series Online:  
Website: [njpac.org/takeastand](http://njpac.org/takeastand)  
Hashtag: #NJPACTakeAStand  
Youtube: Standing in Solidarity playlist

# NEWARK'S GREAT MIGRATION STORY TOLD AT THE NEWARK PUBLIC LIBRARY



Black Migration from South to North of America

Credit : NJPAC.org

BY MABEL PAIS

Hear how the Great Migration - the mid-twentieth-century movement of hundreds of thousands of Black families from the rural South to the urban North - transformed Newark, in the words of those who made the journey themselves, and those who welcomed the new arrivals.

Dr. Katie Singer will present a talk on 'Newark's Great Migration: Stories from the Krueger-Scott African American Oral History Collection' at the Newark Public Library's James Brown African American Room on April 8 at 6 PM.

Dr. Singer's research is based on scores of recordings of Newark residents - mayors, ministers and regular, everyday people - who experienced the impact of the migration on our city. The recordings were made in the 1990s to serve as an exhibit at a Newark museum of African American history that was planned but ultimately never built. The recordings were then stored on cassette

tapes at the Newark Public Library for decades until a cohort of Rutgers University - Newark graduate students including Dr. Singer unearthed, transcribed and digitized them.

Among those whose voices are included in the collection are the late Newark Council president Mildred Crump, former Newark Mayor Sharpe James, and Dr. Zachary Yamba, former President of Essex County College.

Listen to Mildred Crump - [youtu.be/qx2spNSPOvw](https://youtu.be/qx2spNSPOvw)

Dr. Singer's talk is based on her new book, "Alien Soil: Oral Histories of Great Migration Newark" (Rutgers University Press, 2024), a history of Newark's evolution based on the stories told in the oral history collection.

## REGISTRATION

Registration is required. To register, visit [njpac.org/event/voices-from-the-past-newark-and-the-great-migration-newark-history-society/#register](http://njpac.org/event/voices-from-the-past-newark-and-the-great-migration-newark-history-society/#register).

# LAUGH WITH ICONIC COMIC PAULA POUNDSTONE

BY MABEL PAIS

Get ready for an evening of laughter at NJPAC with the legendary Paula Poundstone! Come to New Jersey Performing Arts Center on Friday, April 4, 2025, at 8 PM for an unforgettable comedy experience.

Paula Poundstone, known for her standout HBO specials like *Cats, Cops, and Stuff* and *Paula Poundstone Goes to Harvard*, will take the stage with her brilliant observational stand-up comedy that has made her a fan

favorite.

As a regular panelist on NPR's "Wait, Wait... Don't Tell Me!" and the host of her successful comedy podcast "Nobody Listens to Paula Poundstone," Paula Poundstone's quick wit and humor are sure to leave you in stitches. Don't miss your chance to see this influential comedian live!

## TICKETS

For tickets to see Paula Poundstone visit [NJPAC.org](http://NJPAC.org) or the NJPAC Box Office or call 888. GO.NJPAC (888.466.5722).

# CELEBRATE THE EXHIBIT OF ELDER STORIES AT THE NEWARK PUBLIC LIBRARY

BY MABEL PAIS

On April 9th, join the Newark Public Library for a special celebration recognizing Black Elders of the 'Pearls of Wisdom: Elders' Stories 'Portraits of Resistance, Resiliency and Respect' exhibit, on display at the Newark Public Library until April 30th. Witness an intergenerational exchange between the young and old generations, as First Avenue Elementary students share their multi-module artworks - including dance and art collages - with NJPAC's Elders Council, a group of prominent Black leaders who are nominated and voted for acceptance into the council. The students will be presenting artwork inspired by the Elders' experiences, highlighting their wisdom through a beautiful visual and storytelling display.

This powerful showcase, honoring the stories of community elders, is an extension of the 'Pearls of Wisdom' Youtube series, a collection of recorded conversations with the Elders Council members, preserving the insights they've accrued over their lifetimes for future generations to listen to.

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

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

# LEND AN EAR TO BEETHOVEN'S NINTH SYMPHONY WHILE XIAN ZHANG CONDUCTS



Xian Zhang, Conductor - NJ Symphony

Credit: njsymphony.org

BY MABEL PAIS

Lend an ear to New Jersey Symphony's performances of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony with Music Director Xian Zhang conducting. There are four performances in New Jersey locations, April 3-6, 2025 (see program below).

**PROGRAM**

Beethoven's Ninth Symphony with Xian Zhang  
New Jersey Symphony Classical  
Xian Zhang conductor  
Steven Banks saxophone  
Felicia Moore soprano  
Kelley O'Connor mezzo-soprano  
Issachah Savage tenor  
Reginald Smith Jr. baritone  
Montclair State University Chorale |

Heather J. Buchanan, director  
**NEW JERSEY SYMPHONY**

Newark - Thursday, April 3, 1:30 pm, NJPAC  
Newark - Friday, April 4, 8 pm, NJPAC  
Newark - Saturday, April 5, 8 pm, NJPAC  
New Brunswick - Sunday, April 6, 3 pm, State Theatre New Jersey  
Vocalists Felicia Moore, soprano; Kelley O'Connor, mezzo-soprano; Issachah Savage, tenor; and Reginald Smith Jr., baritone; are set to join the Symphony stage for Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 'Choral' along with Montclair State University Chorale under the leadership of Director Heather J. Buchanan. Saxophonist Steven Banks will appear as a soloist in Billy Childs' 'Diaspora.'  
*Watch Heather J. Buchanan speak of Beethoven with her choir humming in the*

*background -*

[youtu.be/oAwSjM07tLg](https://youtu.be/oAwSjM07tLg)

Starting off the program is Tchaikovsky's Polonaise from 'Eugene Onegin,' the opener to the third act of his most famous opera and a concert hall staple. The first half closes with Billy Childs' 'Diaspora,' where he relays the experience of Black America using three poems by Black poets as guideposts.

The second half features Beethoven's Ninth, which changed symphonic music when it first premiered. In the Ninth Symphony's finale, Beethoven used selections from Friedrich von Schiller's poem 'Ode to Joy' ('An die Freude') and was the first composer to incorporate vocal soloists and a chorus into a symphony.

**PRE-CONCERT CLASSICAL CONVERSATION - THURSDAY, APRIL 3**

A pre-concert Classical Conversation will take place on Thursday, April 3, at 12:30 pm at NJPAC in Newark. Concertgoers will be able to learn more about the music from Symphony musicians, guest artists, and other engaging insiders.

**NEXT GEN HAPPY HOUR - SATURDAY, APRIL 5**

Saturday, April 5, at 6 pm at Newark Local Beer in Newark  
Join your fellow Next Gen members for a fun happy hour before the performance at Newark Local Beer, including free appetizers and a meet-and-greet with New Jersey Symphony musicians.



Heather Buchanan  
Credit: montclair.edu

You can learn more about the New Jersey Symphony Next Gen program at [njsymphony.org/nextgen](https://njsymphony.org/nextgen).

RSVP at [eventbrite.com/e/nj-symphony-next-gen-happy-hour-tickets-1284911287249](https://eventbrite.com/e/nj-symphony-next-gen-happy-hour-tickets-1284911287249)

Pre-concert Performance - Sunday, April 6

A pre-concert performance by the Lieberman Quartet (part of the Symphony's Youth Orchestra) will take place on Sunday, April 6, at 2 pm, at

State Theatre New Jersey in New Brunswick.

**TICKETS**

For more information on concerts and tickets, visit [njsymphony.org/events](https://njsymphony.org/events).

- Xian Zhang  
Learn more at [xianzhangconductor.com](https://xianzhangconductor.com).
  - Steven Banks  
Learn more at [steven-banks.com](https://steven-banks.com).
  - Felicia Moore  
Learn more at [feliciamoore.com](https://feliciamoore.com).
  - Kelley O'Connor  
Learn more at [kelleyoconnor.com](https://kelleyoconnor.com).
  - Issachah Savage  
Learn more at [issachahsavages.com](https://issachahsavages.com).
  - Reginald Smith Jr.  
Learn more at [reginaldsmithjr.com](https://reginaldsmithjr.com).
  - Montclair State University Chorale |  
Heather J. Buchanan, director  
Learn more at [montclair.edu/john-j-california-school-of-music/msu-choral-program](https://montclair.edu/john-j-california-school-of-music/msu-choral-program) and [linkedin.com/in/heather-j-buchanan](https://linkedin.com/in/heather-j-buchanan)
- (Mabel Pais writes on Social Issues, Health and Wellness, Spirituality, The Arts and Entertainment, Business and Cuisine)

# NJ SYMPHONY PERFORMS LIVE-TO-FILM CONCERT - 'STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS'

BY MABEL PAIS

New Jersey Symphony will present 'Star Wars: The Force Awakens in Concert' brought to life by composer John Williams' GRAMMY® Award-winning score performed live to the film. The concert will be led by conductor Constantine Kitsopoulos, April 9, 10, 12, and 13 at New Jersey locations (see program below).

**PROGRAM**

Star Wars: The Force Awakens in Concert  
New Jersey Symphony at the Movies  
Constantine Kitsopoulos conductor  
Red Bank - Wednesday, April 9, 7:30 pm, Count Basie Center for the Arts  
Morristown - Thursday, April 10, 7:30 pm, Mayo Performing Arts Center  
Newark - Saturday, April 12, 8 pm, NJPAC  
New Brunswick - Sunday, April 13, 3 pm, State Theatre New Jersey  
For more information on concerts and tickets, visit [njsymphony.org/events](https://njsymphony.org/events).

**STORY**

In 'Star Wars: The Force Awakens in Concert,' the GRAMMY®-winning soundtrack by legendary composer John Williams will be performed along with the Oscar-nominated film to thrilling effect in a live



Star Wars concert experience.  
Credit: njsymphony.org

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Since the release of the first 'Star Wars' movie over 45

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



## No cuts in Salman's Sikandar, but changes in political scenes

Actor Salman Khan's 'Sikandar' has been passed by the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) with a UA 13+ rating. While the board has suggested no cuts to the AR Murugadoss directorial, a few modifications have been made to the scenes featuring political parties. A report in Bollywood Hungama mentioned that the board asked the 'Sikandar' team to mute the word 'home' from 'Home Minister' wherever required, and also suggested that they blur the political party hoarding in a scene. The rest of the action and dialogue were approved without any changes or modifications.

"Thankfully, the makers were not asked to make any visual cuts. Hence, all the action and violent scenes have been spared modifications or deletions," the report mentioned.

The run-time of the film, as written on the certificate, is 150.08 minutes (two hours, 30 minutes and 8 seconds). However, various other reports suggest that the film is even shorter, with a run-time of two hours, 15 minutes and 46 seconds.

'Sikandar' is an action drama where Khan plays the saviour, while Sathyaraj plays the role of an evil politician.

# Ajey: The Untold Story of a Yogi brings Adityanath's life to screen

A film chronicling the life of Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath was announced on March 26. Titled Ajey: The Untold Story of a Yogi, the film is based on Shantanu Gupta's book The Monk Who Became Chief Minister. A motion poster was also unveiled along with the announcement.

The motion poster features actor Anant Joshi portraying Yogi Adityanath, renouncing the world to serve people. Paresh Rawal's voice can be heard in the background, saying, "Vo kuch nahi chahta tha, sab usko chahte the. Janta ne usko sarkar bana diya (He didn't wish for anything. Everyone loved him. People made him a leader)."

Directed by Maharani 2 fame Ravindra Gautam, Ajey: The Untold Story of a Yogi also stars Dinesh Lal Yadav, Ajay Mengi, Pavan Malhotra, Rajesh Khattar, Garima Vikrant Singh, and Sarwar Ahuja.

The film's title is largely inspired by Yogi Adityanath's birth name, Ajay Singh Bisht.

Scheduled for a 2025 theatrical release, the film will be available in Hindi, Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, and Malayalam. The music is composed by Meet Bros, with writing by Dilip Bachchan Jha and Priyank Dubey. Vishnu Rao serves as the director of photography, while Uday Prakash Singh is the production designer.

Speaking about the film, director Ravindra Gautam said, "Our film is incredibly inspiring for the youth of our country, portraying the story of a simple middle-class boy from a remote village in Uttarakhand who rises to become the Chief Minister of India's most populous state. His journey is one of determination, selflessness, faith, and leadership, and we have worked hard to create an experience that does justice to his extraordinary life."

The film is produced by Ritu Mengi under the banner of Samrat Cinematics



## Ajay Devgn's Raid 2 to release in May after multiple delays

Actor Ajay Devgn is set to return as income tax officer Amay Patnaik in Raid 2. He shared the film's poster and announced the release date. Directed by Rajkumar Gupta, the film also stars Riteish Deshmukh, Vaani Kapoor, and Saurabh Shukla among others in key roles.

Raid 2 is set to release in theatres on May 1. Ajay shared the poster and announced the same. Naya Shehar. Nayi File. Aur Amay Patnaik Ki Ek Nayi Raid. #Raid2 knocking at your doors in cinemas near you on 1st May 2025 (sic)," he wrote.

The film was earlier slated to release on November 15, 2024, then postponed to 21 February 2025, but was deferred. Extensively shot in Delhi and Lucknow, Raid 2 promises another adrenaline-filled ride.

The first part was based on the real-life income-tax raid conducted by the officers of the IT department on Sardar Inder Singh in the 1980s which distinguished itself from others for being the longest raid in Indian history, lasting three days and two nights.

Raid 2 is produced by Bhushan Kumar, Kumar Mangat Pathak, Abhishek Pathak and Krishan Kumar. The film is presented by Gulshan Kumar and T-Series and is a Panorama Studios production. Raid 2 is now slated to release in theatres on May 1.



## Kiara flaunts her baby bump, goes house hunting with Sidharth

One month ago, star couple Kiara Advani and Sidharth Malhotra announced that they are expecting their first child together. The love birds, who tied the knot in 2023 in a grand wedding after dating for a few years, shared a picture of their hands holding baby booties in them, with the message: "The greatest gift of our lives Coming soon". It was beyond adorable and soon took the internet by storm, much like their weddings pictures had. Well, today the soon to be parents were snapped out and about, hunting for a new house where they will welcome the baby on board. But Kiara and Sidharth were not alone!

They were joined by Kiara Advani's breathtaking pregnancy glow, her cute little baby bump which has started to show and Shah Rukh Khan's interior designer wife Gauri Khan. Known for designing

celebrity homes and vanity vans across Tinsel Town, Gauri is reportedly going to work on Kiara and Sidharth's new home with them, which will hopefully be ready by the time their baby is born. Sidharth looked handsome as ever in a casual navy blue checkered shirt and deep olive green pants whereas mommy-to-be Kiara kept it comfortable yet chic in a loose pink shirt with her hair in a bun. The two were snapped walking to their car, Kiara with one hand on her bump and the other in Sidharth's hand.

Seeing the soon to be parents together filled many hearts with love! In the comment section, many fans showered love on the adorable couple. However, there were some trolls who claimed that Kiara had taken inspiration from fellow actor Alia Bhatt, who also opted for a pink shirt to flaunt her baby bump.



# Ben Affleck reflects on his relationship with Jennifer Garner amid dating rumors

**B**en Affleck is reflecting on his personal life and the strong bond he shares with his ex-wife, Jennifer Garner. In his GQ April 2025 cover story, published on March 25, the actor opened up about fame, fatherhood, and the challenges of living in the public eye.

While discussing the scrutiny surrounding his life, he spoke about co-parenting their three children—Violet, Seraphina, and Samuel—and praised the relationship he and Garner have maintained over the years.

Affleck revealed, "I've ended up focusing on is: look, I know what's going on in my life. And also, really more importantly, my kids know. We used to have a thing, my ex-wife and I, when they would see something on a supermarket stand, we would say, well, 'You know this isn't always true because if it were, you would have 15 brothers or sisters or whatever the number of stories is where they said that your mom was pregnant,'" as reported by The Mirror US.

He continued, "And I'm really lucky that I have a really good co-parent and partner in Jennifer Garner, the kids' mom, who's wonderful and great and we work together well. It's more of a headache than anything else and there certainly are worse things. I have yet to figure out why I'm an object of —"

Affleck and Garner's close bond is not a secret to anyone and was even more evident during a recent family outing for their son Samuel's 13th birthday.

On March 2, the former couple was spotted at a paintball venue in Los Angeles, fully geared up with protective masks, vests, and paintball guns.



## Selena Gomez admits getting tad bitter over comments about her weight

**S**inger-actor Selena Gomez has spoken candidly about the challenges of being a high-profile woman in the age of social media and the toll it has taken on her. During a conversation on the On Purpose with Jay Shetty podcast, the Only Murders in the Building star and her fiancé, music producer Benny Blanco, discussed online negativity. While Benny admitted that he avoids reading negative comments and is largely indifferent to public opinion, Selena had a different outlook.

"I was also going to point out that women have it much worse," she remarked. "From my perspective it's pretty wild, and I think this isn't news to anybody, that obviously women have a lot more intense feelings from their appearance to what they're wearing to everything."

Unlike Benny, Selena acknowledged that she does sometimes come across critical remarks about herself. "When I get prepared for an event, 90 percent of the time I'm just like, 'I just hope I can take the picture and sit down,'" she admitted. However, she added, "It's the character that gets judged, it's the way I'm not white enough, I'm not Mexican enough."



## Rachel Zegler's 'dismissive' comment about Gal Gadot sparked feud between Snow White co-stars

**R**achel Zegler made a "dismissive" comment about Gal Gadot that led to a fallout between them, according to a new report by Variety. The bombshell claim comes as Disney's Snow White remake continues to face backlash after its doomed box office opening weekend.

The bombshell report details the constant problems Disney was met with due to the 23-year-old actress' controversial social media posts, which included "Free Palestine" and "F\*\*k Donald Trump."

Sources per the outlet explained that Zegler and Gadot "got along well" and that there was no "bad blood" at the time of filming. However, "things got awkward" in the lead-up to the film's release.

Following their joint appearance at the 2025 Oscars, where they presented an award together, Zegler called Gadot "a professional pageant queen" in an Instagram reply. The West Side Story star's remark was "considered a dismissive way to describe a fellow actress," per the sources.

Moreover, Zegler's pro-Palestine remarks contributed to tensions between the Snow White co-stars as Gadot, who is an Israeli, faced death threats. Disney had to pay for additional security for the mother-of-four, per the outlet.

"She didn't understand the repercussions of her actions as far as what that meant for the film, for Gal, for anyone," an insider said of Zegler. The film, helmed by Marc

Webb, has been plagued by backlash due to costly reshoots and the Spellbound actress' controversial posts.

Following the presidential elections, Zegler wrote on Instagram, "May Trump supporters ... never know peace," sparking boycott calls from President Donald Trump's supporters.

The post against the president was when Disney "had had enough" of Zegler as she "was signaling to half the potential audience of an already troubled film."

Film producer Marc Platt flew twice to directly meet Zegler, who, after a "back and forth", agreed to work with a "social media guru paid for by Disney to vet any posts before the film's" release.

# Italian Focus at the 2025 Habitat International Film Festival



By Murtaza Ali

MARCH 25, 2025

**NEW DELHI (TIP):** The Habitat International Film Festival (HIFF) 2025 enthralled cinephiles with a spectacular showcase of Italian cinema. Held at the India Habitat Centre, the festival's Italian Focus segment, curated in collaboration with the Italian Embassy Cultural Centre, Cineteca di Bologna, and L'Immagine Ritrovata, was a resounding success. It celebrated Italy's rich cinematic heritage while offering a glimpse into the dynamic contemporary landscape of Italian storytelling.



Legendary Italian filmmaker Marco Tullio Giordana (left) with Andrea Anastasio, Director, Italian Embassy Cultural Centre

The fourth edition of Italian Screens returned to New Delhi, featuring a selection of contemporary films and restored classics. Roberto Stabile, Head of the International Department at Cinecittà, emphasized the significance of this initiative, stating, "This platform not only showcases the best of contemporary Italian cinema but also strengthens Indo-Italian creative collaboration."



Vittorio De Sica's Miracle in Milan - poster

Festival audiences were treated to a diverse lineup of films, from neorealist masterpieces to modern cinematic gems. Highlights included Vittorio De Sica's 'Shoeshine' and Federico Fellini's 'La Dolce Vita,' both of which captivated audiences with their timeless storytelling. The centenary tribute to Marcello Mastroianni was a particular highlight, paying homage to the legendary actor who remains a symbol of Italian cinema's golden age.

HIFF 2025 was not just about screenings-it fostered dialogue and learning through an array of discussions and workshops. One of the standout sessions was Celine Pozzi's exclusive workshop on film restoration, where she offered a behind-the-scenes look at preserving



Vittorio De Sica's Shoeshine - Still 1

cinematic treasures. The collaboration with the Aga Khan Trust for Culture brought additional depth, hosting a discourse on the intersection of archaeology and film preservation.

In a special parallel event, the Italian Embassy Cultural Centre and the Aga Khan Trust for Culture presented Milo Adami's documentaries at Humayun's Tomb Museum. A public talk featuring filmmaker Milo Adami, actor Giuseppe Cederna, and cultural experts provided valuable insights into heritage, democracy, and cinema's role in shaping public consciousness.



Vittorio De Sica's Shoeshine - poster

As HIFF 2025 came to a close, it left an indelible mark on audiences and industry professionals alike. Beyond the grandeur of screenings and discussions, the festival successfully created a space where cultures converged, ideas flourished, and the magic of cinema was reaffirmed.

The Italian Focus at HIFF 2025 proved to be a testament to the power of film to unite, inspire, and transcend borders. There is no denying that Italian cinema continues to enchant the audiences worldwide.

(Murtaza Ali Khan is an award-winning film critic who has served on the jury of the 69th and the 70th National Awards. He has been covering cinema, arts, and culture for the last decade and a half. He can be reached at [murtaza.jmi@gmail.com](mailto:murtaza.jmi@gmail.com)).

The festival reaffirmed the strong artistic and cultural ties between Italy and India, emphasizing the shared storytelling traditions of both nations. The newly restored 'Apu Trilogy' was a standout attraction, underscoring the profound influence of Italian neorealism on Satyajit Ray's filmmaking.

Andrea Anastasio, director of the Italian Embassy Cultural Centre, reflected on the festival's impact: "HIFF 2025 has been an incredible journey in celebrating the artistic and emotional depth of Italian cinema. We are grateful for the unwavering support from Cineteca di Bologna, the Italian Ministry of Culture, and the India Habitat Centre in making this a reality."



# April Fool's Day: Origins, traditions and impact

April Fool's Day, observed on April 1st every year, is a day dedicated to pranks, hoaxes, and playful deception. People across the world indulge in lighthearted jokes, attempting to outwit their friends, family, colleagues, and even the media. Although its precise origins remain uncertain, April Fool's Day has become a global phenomenon that transcends cultures and generations.

This article explores the historical background, customs, notable pranks, regional variations, and the impact of April Fool's Day in the modern era. Additionally, we will examine how technology has influenced the way pranks are executed and how businesses and the media have capitalized on the tradition.

## Origins of April Fool's Day

### The Gregorian Calendar Theory

One of the most widely accepted theories about the origins of April Fool's Day stems from the adoption of the Gregorian calendar. In 1582, Pope Gregory XIII replaced the Julian calendar with the Gregorian calendar, shifting New Year's Day from April 1st to January 1st. Some people, either out of ignorance or resistance to change, continued to celebrate New Year's on April 1st and were mocked as "April fools." They were often subjected to pranks and jokes, which may have contributed to the modern tradition of foolery on this day.

### Roman and Medieval Festivals

Other theories suggest that April Fool's Day has ties to ancient Roman and medieval traditions. The Roman festival of Hilaria, celebrated in late March, was a day of joy and mirth where people wore disguises and mocked one another. Similarly, the medieval Feast of Fools, held in early January, involved playful mischief and role reversals, reminiscent of modern April Fool's customs. These celebrations emphasized inversion of social norms, which could have laid the foundation for the pranking culture seen today.

### Chaucer's Canterbury Tales

Some scholars point to Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (1392) as a potential reference to April Fool's Day. In "The Nun's Priest's Tale," a passage suggests a connection between trickery and April 1st, though this may be due to a misinterpretation of the text. Some believe that Chaucer's wording may have inadvertently led to the association between pranks and April 1st in later centuries.

## Traditions and Customs

### Personal Pranks

At its core, April Fool's Day is about tricking people into believing something false, only to reveal the truth with an exclamation of "April Fool!" Common pranks include swapping sugar for salt, setting alarm clocks early, and taping



signs to unsuspecting people's backs. More elaborate pranks may involve fake lottery tickets, staged mishaps, or convincing someone of an outrageous but harmless lie.

### Workplace and School Pranks

In professional and educational settings, April Fool's Day often brings collective participation in pranks. Office workers may tape down a colleague's mouse sensor, schedule fake meetings, or send humorous fake memos. In schools, teachers and students engage in lighthearted tricks, such as fake pop quizzes, surprise schedule changes, or pretend announcements over the intercom.

### Media Hoaxes

Newspapers, radio stations, and television networks have a long history of publishing fake news stories to fool the public. One of the most famous media hoaxes occurred in 1957 when the BBC aired a segment about the Swiss spaghetti harvest, showing farmers picking spaghetti from trees. The prank was so convincing that many viewers called in, asking how they could grow their own spaghetti trees.

### Corporate Pranks

Many companies join in on the fun by launching fake product announcements. For instance, Google has a tradition of elaborate pranks, such as announcing a fictional new service like "Google Nose" (a scent-based search engine). Other brands have promoted absurd fake products like self-driving bicycles, edible coffee cups, and even toothpaste with dessert flavors.

## Notable April Fool's Pranks

### The Spaghetti Tree Hoax (1957)

The BBC aired a segment on Panorama showing Swiss farmers harvesting spaghetti from trees. Many viewers believed it and even called the station

This prank demonstrated how branding and marketing could be seamlessly integrated into April Fool's hoaxes.

## Regional Variations

### France and Italy: Poisson d'Avril

In France and Italy, April Fool's Day is known as Poisson d'Avril ("April Fish"). Children tape paper fish to people's backs and shout when the prank is discovered. This tradition dates back to the 16th century and is believed to have originated when France switched from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar, similar to the "April Fool" phenomenon elsewhere.

### Scotland: Hunt-the-Gowk Day

In Scotland, the tradition extends over two days. The first day, Hunt-the-Gowk Day, involves sending people on pointless errands, while the second day, Taily Day, focuses on pranks related to the backside (e.g., pinning "Kick Me" signs). Scotland's extended celebration reflects its deep-rooted love for humor and jesting.

### India and Iran

In India, April Fool's Day aligns with the festival of Holi, a time of playful mischief where people throw colored powders and drench each other with water. In Iran, a similar tradition known as Sizard Bedar occurs on April 1st or 2nd, where people play tricks on each other. These traditions demonstrate that humor and practical jokes are a global phenomenon with diverse cultural expressions.

## The Role of Social Media and Technology

In recent years, the internet has transformed April Fool's Day. Viral memes, fake news articles, and elaborate digital hoaxes spread rapidly across social media platforms, sometimes fooling even the most skeptical users. Companies, influencers, and even governments have used April Fool's Day as an opportunity to engage with audiences in creative and unexpected ways.

However, the rise of misinformation has also led to discussions about the ethical implications of deceptive content. Some hoaxes have sparked unnecessary panic, while others have led to widespread confusion. As a result, some organizations have opted out of April Fool's pranks to avoid the risk of misinforming the public.

## Ethical Considerations

While April Fool's pranks are meant to be harmless, they can sometimes cross the line into cruelty or misinformation. Ethical pranking involves ensuring that the joke does not cause harm, embarrassment, or fear. Transparency and good intentions are key to maintaining the spirit of April Fool's Day. Some organizations have also issued guidelines to ensure pranks remain fun and do not spread harmful false information.



asking how they could grow their own spaghetti trees. This hoax remains one of the most famous media pranks of all time, illustrating the power of television in creating convincing hoaxes.

### Taco Liberty Bell (1996)

Taco Bell ran a full-page ad in newspapers claiming it had purchased the Liberty Bell and renamed it the "Taco Liberty Bell." Outraged citizens called the National Park Service until Taco Bell revealed it was a joke. The prank gained widespread media attention and served as a brilliant marketing strategy for the fast-food chain.

### Google's Many Pranks

Google has been a leader in April Fool's jokes for years, unveiling absurd yet amusing fake products. In 2013, they introduced "Google Nose," a service that purportedly allowed users to search for smells online. Other pranks included "Google Translate for Animals" and "Gmail Motion," a feature that supposedly allowed users to compose emails using body movements.

### Left-Handed Whopper (1998)

Burger King advertised a "Left-Handed Whopper," claiming it was specially designed for left-handed customers. Thousands of people went to restaurants requesting it before realizing the joke.

## MACRON SAYS EUROPE WILL DEPLOY TROOPS IN UKRAINE AFTER PEACE, BUT SOME NATIONS HESITATE

27 MAR 2025

**PARIS (TIP):** France and Britain will continue to forge ahead with plans to deploy troops in Ukraine to secure an eventual peace deal with Russia but only some other nations want to take part, French President Emmanuel Macron said Thursday after a summit of countries that have been mulling the proposal.

"These reassurance forces are a French-British proposal," Macron said. "It is desired by Ukraine and noted by several member states that have expressed their willingness to join. It is not unanimous. That is known. Besides, we do not need unanimity to achieve it."

Macron said French and British military officials will work with Ukrainian counterparts to decide where the contingents could be deployed in Ukraine.

"These exchanges between military officials will define the locations, the number of troops so it is credible," he said. "There will be a reassurance force with several European nations that will deploy."

The summit hosting the leaders of nearly 30 countries plus NATO and European Union chiefs comes at a crucial juncture in the more than three-year war, with intensifying diplomatic efforts to broker ceasefires, driven by pressure from US President Donald Trump to end the fighting.

But the conflict is raging on.

Before the leaders met in the luxury of the French presidential palace, Russian drone attacks overnight wounded more than 20 people and heavy shelling Thursday afternoon killed one person and knocked out electricity in parts of Kherson, Ukrainian officials said.

US-brokered agreements this week to safeguard shipping in the Black Sea and last week to halt long-range strikes on energy infrastructure were greeted as a first step toward peace. But Ukraine and Russia have disagreed over the details and accused each other of deal violations, foreshadowing a long and contentious process ahead.

France and the United Kingdom are pushing a separate initiative to build a coalition of nations willing in one way or another to support the deployment of a European armed force in Ukraine, with the aim of securing any peace deal by dissuading Russia from attacking the country again.

Some European countries are more comfortable with a potential deployment than others—not least because a big unknown is whether Trump would allow American forces and intelligence agencies to back up any European contingent with air and logistical support and other assistance.

Building a force big enough to act as a credible deterrent—UK officials have talked about possibly 10,000 to 30,000 troops—would also be a considerable effort for nations that shrank their militaries after the Cold War but are now rearming. (AP)

## PM Mark Carney say Canada's traditional ties with US are over amid auto tariff threats

28 MAR 2025

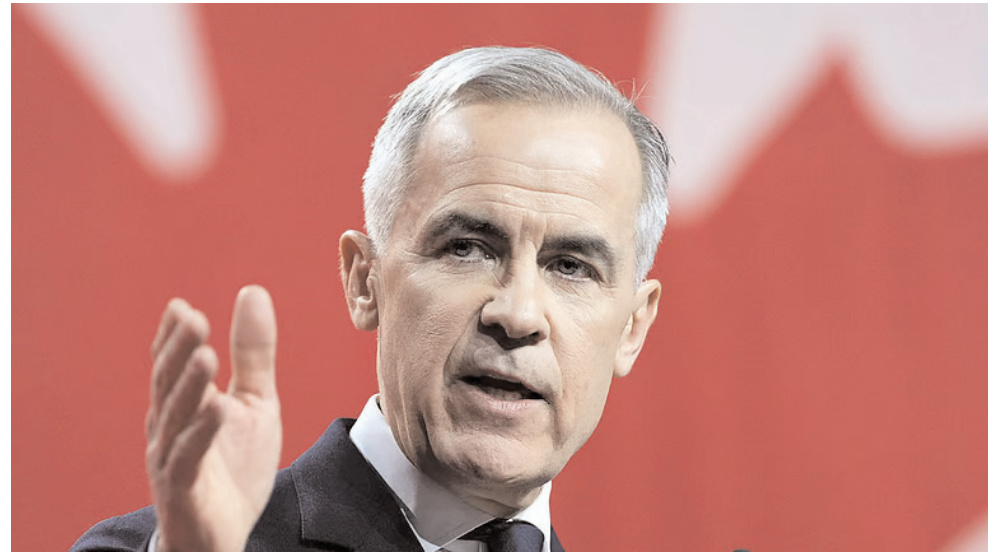
**OTTAWA (TIP):** In a dramatic shift in Canada's foreign policy, Prime Minister Mark Carney declared on Thursday that the long-standing economic and security relationship between Canada and the United States has come to an end. This statement followed US President Donald Trump's announcement of new auto tariffs that could severely impact Canada's economy, Politico reported.

"The old relationship we had with the United States, based on deepening economic integration and tight security and military cooperation, is over," Carney said on Parliament Hill after breaking from his federal campaign trail to respond to Trump's latest threats.

Trump announced on Wednesday that his administration would impose a 25% tariff on auto imports from Canada, the European Union, Japan, and South Korea. He also threatened to introduce additional tariffs targeting other major US trading partners.

In response, Carney said he would speak with Trump in the coming days but emphasised that any discussions must respect Canada's sovereignty. "We must fundamentally reimagine our economy. We need to ensure that Canada can succeed in a drastically different world," he said.

Carney convened his Cabinet's committee on Canada-US relations upon returning to Ottawa. Canada has indicated it is prepared to retaliate, but the government has not revealed specific countermeasures. "We are facing a comprehensive and broad negotiation," Carney said, adding that he would not disclose Canada's response strategy



prematurely.

Flavio Volpe, president of the Automotive Parts Manufacturers Association of Canada, warned that if the tariffs go forward, both countries' auto industries could be paralyzed within a week.

"One day, two days, three days where you hope the president shows you mercy. You're a publicly traded company whose share price is taking a beating, and you have a fiduciary obligation to shareholders," Volpe told Politico.

Ontario Premier Doug Ford spoke with US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick on Wednesday about the potential impact on his province.

According to Ford, Lutnick explained that tariffs on vehicles from Canada and Mexico would be adjusted based on US content. For example, if a car built in Mexico contains 50% American parts, the tariff rate would be reduced to 12.5%,

rather than the full 25%.

"He's reassuring us that there'll be no plant closures. My response was Ronald Reagan's response: Trust but verify," Ford said. "If they're opening or closing, it's going to be up to the CEOs."

Ford also confirmed that he spoke with Carney and both agreed that Canada would fully retaliate if necessary. Ottawa has previously stated it could impose up to CAD 155 billion in counter-tariffs on US goods.

Trump responded on Truth Social early Thursday, warning that if Canada and the EU coordinated against the tariffs, the US would introduce even harsher trade measures. "If the European Union works with Canada in order to do economic harm to the USA, large-scale tariffs, far larger than currently planned, will be placed on them both in order to protect the best friend that each of those two countries has ever had!" Trump wrote. (ANI)

## Six dead, 38 rescued as tourist submarine carrying mainly Russians sinks off Egypt's coast

27 MAR 2025

**CAIRO (TIP):** A tourist submarine taking dozens of people, mainly Russians, to see the Red Sea's coral reefs sank off the Egyptian resort town of Hurghada, leaving six people dead and others injured, two municipal officials said Thursday.

Emergency crews were able to rescue at least 38 Russians, the Russian consul in Hurghada told the country's state news agency RIA Novosti. The report said 14 of them were hospitalized and the rest returned to their hotel.

Russian and Egyptian officials did not immediately say what caused the submarine to sink.

Russia's Tass news agency said five Russians were confirmed dead, including two children. The two Egyptian municipal officials said the total toll was six, but the nationality of the sixth was not immediately known. The officials spoke to the Associated Press on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to brief the media.

Russia's consulate in Hurghada said



in a statement that 45 Russians were on board the submarine, "Sindbad," which operated from a hotel of the same name. It was not immediately known how many crew members or other tourists were on board, but the submarine has a capacity of 50 people.

Hurghada is a major destination for divers, snorkelers and other tourists drawn by the extensive coral reefs in Red Sea. Several outlets offer tours in submarines with large windows in the bottom to allow groups to view the

reefs and marine life, usually cruising at around 20 meters (60 feet) in depth.

In November, a tourist yacht sank in the Red Sea after warnings of rough waters, Egyptian officials said. At least four people drowned, while 33 were rescued.

Tourism is an important sector of Egypt's economy but many tourist companies have stopped or limited traveling on the Red Sea due to the dangers from conflicts in the region. (AP)

## Bosnian court seeks international arrest warrant for pro-Russian Serb president Dodik

27 MAR 2025

**SARAJEVO, BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA (TIP):** A Bosnian court said Thursday it was seeking an international arrest warrant for Bosnian Serb President Milorad Dodik, who is facing legal action for his separatist policies.

The Court of Bosnia-Herzegovina said in a statement that it issued the demand on Wednesday and that the decision is now in the hands of Interpol.

Pro-Russia Dodik, who leads the Serb-run half of Bosnia, has repeatedly called for the separation of the territory from the rest of Bosnia, fueling fears of instability.

He has faced US and British sanctions for his separatism, but he has had the support of Moscow.

Defying Bosnia's court, Dodik has refused to appear for questioning on suspicion that he violated the country's



constitution. He traveled this week to neighboring Serbia, where he attended an gathering with populist President Aleksandar Vucic, before proceeding to Israel.

Vucic has said Serbia would not arrest Dodik and has criticized legal

proceedings against him.

The Bosnia court statement also said it is seeking the arrest of Bosnian Serb parliament speaker Nenad Stevandić, who also briefly visited Serbia.

There have been fears of clashes between the police loyal to Dodik and the Bosnian police forces, stoking tensions that have pushed Bosnia to the biggest crisis since more than 100,000 people were killed in an ethnic war from 1992 to 1995.

The conflict in Bosnia ended in a US-brokered peace deal that created two administrations bound by central institutions.

Bosnia's Serbs took up arms after the breakup of the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s' to create a state with an aim to join neighboring Serbia.

Bosnia has been seeking European Union membership, but progress has been slow because of constant ethnic and political disputes. (AP)



## A FIRE AT A WINTER RESORT HOTEL IN TURKEY KILLS AN OLYMPIC SKIER AND HIS FATHER

27 MAR 2025

**ISTANBUL (TIP):** A fire at a closed ski resort hotel in northwest Turkey killed an Olympic skier and his father Thursday, two months after a blaze at another Turkish winter resort left 79 dead.

The victims were named as Yahya Usta, president of the Turkish Ski and Snowboard Teachers Association, and his 25-year-old son Berkin, a skier who represented Turkey at the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympic Games. Yahya Usta, his son and wife were staying on the hotel's fifth floor.

The Kervansaray Hotel in Uludag, Bursa province, was empty of guests when the fire started at 5:30 a.m. but 12 staff were present, Bursa governor's office said. Several people suffering smoke inhalation were hospitalized.

The 30-year-old hotel was shut down in early January when its accommodation permit was cancelled, the governor's office added.

TV images showed flames quickly engulfing the six-story hotel, located on the slopes of one of Turkey's most popular ski destinations, less than a three-hour drive from Istanbul.

Fire crews brought the blaze under control within two hours but not before the upper floors had been gutted.

Bursa Mayor Mustafa Bozbey said the fire began in the cafeteria.

"I learned with deep sorrow that our national athlete Berkin Usta and his father Yahya Usta lost their lives in the fire that broke out in the hotel in Uludag," Sports Minister Osman Askin Bak said.

Prosecutors have launched an investigation into the Bursa fire.

In January a 12-story ski resort hotel in northwestern Turkey went up in flames during a school holiday, killing 79.

That fire, at the Grand Kartal hotel in Kartalkaya, in Bolu province's Koroglu mountains, also started in the hotel's dining area.

The state-run Anadolu news agency on Wednesday reported fresh arrests relating to the Bolu fire, taking the number of people in detention awaiting trial to 28. (AP)

## South Korea struggles contain massive wildfires as death toll rises to 26

27 MAR 2025

**CHEONGSONG (TIP):** Helicopters dumped water over a burning forest in South Korea on Thursday as authorities struggled to contain the country's worst-ever wildfires, which have killed 26 people, forced at least 37,000 others to flee their homes and destroyed more than 300 structures.

Multiple wildfires have been raging across South Korea's southeastern regions since last Friday. The government has mobilized thousands of people, dozens of helicopters and other equipment to extinguish the blazes, but officials said strong winds are hampering their efforts.

Korea Forest Service chief Lim Sang-seop said "a small amount" — less than 5 millimeters (0.2 inches) — of rain was expected in the area on Thursday, not enough to play a meaningful role in extinguishing the wildfires.

The fatalities include a pilot whose helicopter crashed during efforts to contain a fire and four firefighters and other workers who died after being trapped by fast-moving flames driven by strong winds.

Authorities haven't disclosed details of the civilian dead, except that they are mostly in their 60s and 70s. They suspect human error caused several of the wildfires, including cases where people started fires while clearing overgrown grass from family tombs or with sparks during welding work.

The wildfires have burned 36,010 hectares (88,980 acres) of land in the southeast, the government's disaster response center said in a report Thursday. Observers say that's the worst figure of its kind in South Korea.

The report said the blazes have also injured 30 people, eight of them seriously, destroyed 325 buildings and structures and forced more than 37,180



people to evacuate.

As of Thursday morning, the center said authorities were mobilizing more than 9,000 people and about 120 helicopters to battle the wildfires.

In Cheongsong, one of the fire-hit areas, thick plumes of smoke were bellowing from Juwang Mountain. Helicopters repeatedly hovered over the mountain, dropping water. The amount of smoke later appeared to have diminished.

At a Buddhist temple near the mountain, workers covered a stone pagoda and other structures with fire-resistant materials, while firefighters poured water on sites near the temple.

"Damages are snowballing," acting President Han Duck-soo said in a televised address on Wednesday. "There are concerns that we'll have wildfire damages that we've never experienced, so we have to concentrate all our capabilities on putting out the wildfires this week."

The hardest-hit areas include Andong city and the neighboring counties of Uiseong and Sancheong, and the city of

Ulsan.

On Wednesday night, strong winds and smoke-filled skies forced authorities in the southeastern city of Andong to order evacuations in two villages, including Puncheon, home to the Hahoe folk village — a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Hikers were advised to leave the scenic Jiri Mountain as another fire spread closer.

Officials said earlier this week that firefighters had extinguished most of the flames from the largest wildfires in key areas, but wind and dry conditions allowed them to spread again.

Destroyed in the blazes were houses, factories, vehicles and some historic structures. In Uiseong, about 20 of the 30 structures at the Gounsa temple complex, which was said to be originally built in the 7th century, have been burned. Among them were two state-designated "treasures" — a pavilion-shaped building erected overlooking a stream in 1668, and a Joseon dynasty structure built in 1904 to mark the longevity of a king. (AP)

## PAKISTAN COURT SENTENCES FIVE TO DEATH FOR 'ONLINE BLASPHEMY'

26 MAR 2025

**ISLAMABAD (TIP):** A Pakistan court has sentenced five men to death for posting blasphemous content online, a prosecution lawyer told AFP on Wednesday, as the country witnesses a sharp increase in such cases.

Private groups in Pakistan have brought charges against hundreds of young individuals in recent years for allegedly committing blasphemy online.

Blasphemy is an incendiary charge in Muslim-majority Pakistan, where even unsubstantiated accusations can incite public outrage and lead to lynchings.

"All five accused were sentenced to death for spreading blasphemous content against the holy Prophet," a lawyer from the Legal Commission on Blasphemy Pakistan, a private group which brought the case to court, told AFP.

"Separately all were sentenced to life imprisonment for Koran's desecration and 10 years imprisonment for hurting religious sentiments," lawyer Rao Abdur Raheem said.

The five men -- one Afghan and four Pakistanis -- were sentenced on Tuesday in Rawalpindi, the garrison city that neighbours the capital Islamabad.

The sentences will run concurrently, Raheem said.

The convicts have a right to appeal in the upper courts.

Despite the conviction, Pakistan has never executed anyone for blasphemy. The decision comes a day after a Pakistani YouTube star was charged with blasphemy after launching a perfume named after the very law he has fallen foul of.

Rajab Butt launched his "295" perfume which refers to blasphemy legislation in the penal code.

Currently in Saudi Arabia, the thirty-year-old faces up to 10 years in prison in two blasphemy cases related to videos he posted online.

Many of the online blasphemy cases are being brought to trial by private "vigilante groups" led by lawyers and supported by volunteers who scour the internet for offenders, rights groups and police say.

The Legal Commission on Blasphemy Pakistan (LCBP) is the most active of such groups in Pakistan. Sheraz Ahmad Farooqi, one of the group's leaders, told AFP in October that "God has chosen them for this noble cause".

In January the same court sentenced four men to death for posting "blasphemous content online".

A support group formed by the families of those convicted and arrested on similar charges filed a case in the Islamabad High Court last year, requesting an independent commission be created to investigate the facts around the cases. (AFP)

## Bangladesh's Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus meets Chinese President Xi Jinping

28 MAR 2025

**BEIJING (TIP):** Chinese President Xi Jinping met with Bangladesh's Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus here on Friday, official media reported.

Yunus, on a four-day visit to China, took part in the country's Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference in Hainan after his arrival there on Wednesday.

He arrived in Beijing on Thursday and was received at the airport by Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Sun Weidong.

Gearing up for his meeting with Xi, Yunus called on China on Thursday to reduce interest rates for Chinese loans and waive commitment fees on Chinese-funded projects.

In his meeting with the Chinese Executive Vice Premier Ding Xuexiang on the sidelines of the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference, Yunus sought Chinese support in an array of development projects, Bangladesh media reports said.

He also called for a reduction of interest rates for Chinese loans from three per cent to 1-2 per cent to Bangladesh and sought a waiver of commitment fees on the Chinese-funded projects in Bangladesh.

China is Bangladesh's fourth-largest lender after Japan, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, with total loans disbursed since 1975 coming to USD 7.5 billion, according to a report in the Daily Star newspaper of Bangladesh.

In his meeting with Ding, Yunus sought Beijing's help in facilitating the



relocation of the Chinese manufacturing industries, including ready-made garments, electric vehicles, light machinery, high-tech electronics, chip manufacturing and the solar panel industry.

On the sidelines of the forum, Yunus also met Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexey Overchuk, who expressed Moscow's interest in exporting more wheat and fertiliser to Bangladesh.

"Russia would like to export more wheat and fertiliser to Bangladesh," he said.

During the meeting, the two leaders discussed the operationalisation of the Russia-funded Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant.

Yunus also met former UN Secretary-

General Ban Ki-moon, who is the Chairman of the Boao Forum, and sought support and advice for a smooth transition to democracy in Bangladesh.

"We want to start anew; we need your support and advice. We are having a great opportunity now," Yunus was quoted by the daily as saying.

A day ahead of the scheduled talks between Xi and Yunus, China signalled its desire to expand ties with Dhaka in a changed Bangladesh scenario, state-run BSS news agency reported.

"President Xi Jinping attaches tremendous importance to your (Yunus) visit," BSS quoted Chinese Vice-Premier Ding Xuexiang telling Yunus, hoping for the South Asian nation's prosperity under his interim administration. (PTI)

## Sri Lanka's ruling party MPs seek removal of jailed police chief Deshabandu, write to Speaker

25 MAR 2025

**COLOMBO (TIP):** Over a hundred MPs of the ruling National People's Power (NPP) coalition on Monday wrote to the Parliament Speaker seeking removal of the suspended Sri Lankan police chief "for bringing disrepute to the high office through his abusive conduct."

**DESHABANDU TENNAKOON, THE SUSPENDED INSPECTOR GENERAL OF POLICE, IS CURRENTLY IN REMAND CUSTODY AT A CENTRAL PROVINCIAL JAIL IN KANDY DISTRICT IN CONNECTION WITH A SHOOTING INCIDENT IN 2023.**

On March 20, the magistrate's court in the southern town of Matara ordered the remanding of Tennakoon.

The next hearing of the case will be on April 3.

He surrendered to the court after being on the run for nearly three weeks.

The Matara Magistrate's Court



ordered Tennakoon's arrest over a shooting incident in the southern resort of Weligama on December 30, 2023.

As the Inspector General, Tennakoon had sent police officers from the Colombo Crime Division (CCD) to raid a resort hotel in Weligama in connection with illegal drugs.

However, the Weligama police, unaware of the undercover operation, opened fire at the CCD vehicle, killing an officer.

Tennakoon was suspended in July 2024

"We have handed a letter with 115 signatures from our MPs to the Speaker of Parliament to seek his removal for bringing disrepute to the high office through his abusive conduct," Deputy Minister of Youth Affairs Eranga Gunasekera told reporters.

from his duties by the Supreme Court, which also ordered a hearing on the legality of his appointment after receiving petitions regarding it.

He was appointed police chief in November 2023, despite having been found guilty of torturing a person in custody by the Supreme Court in a fundamental rights petition.

The Inspector General can only be removed through by Parliament, moved by a majority of MPs, following recommendations by a three-member committee headed by a Supreme Court judge. (PTI)

# Eid-al-Fitr: Significance, history, celebration

**EID-AL-FITR, MEANING "FESTIVAL OF BREAKING THE FAST", IS A JOYOUS CULMINATION OF THIS SACRED PERIOD, SYMBOLISING GRATITUDE, RENEWAL AND UNITY WITHIN THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY**

**E**id al-Fitr, also known as the "Festival of Breaking the Fast," is one of the most significant celebrations in Islam. It marks the end of Ramadan, a sacred month of fasting, prayer, and reflection for Muslims worldwide. The festival is a time of joy, gratitude, and communal harmony. In 2025, Eid al-Fitr is expected to be observed on March 31, subject to the sighting of the crescent moon, which signifies the beginning of Shawwal, the tenth month of the Islamic calendar.

## The Significance of Eid al-Fitr

Eid al-Fitr holds profound spiritual and social importance. It serves as a moment of thanksgiving to Allah for granting believers the strength and patience to complete Ramadan. The festival also emphasizes unity, charity, and the bonds of family and friendship.

The core principles that define Eid al-Fitr include:

- **Spiritual Renewal:** Muslims express gratitude to Allah for the completion of Ramadan and seek His continued guidance.
- **Charitable Giving:** Acts of charity, including Zakat al-Fitr, ensure that the underprivileged can also partake in the celebrations.
- **Social Harmony:** Eid fosters a sense of unity and reconciliation within families, communities, and even among different cultures.

## Determining the Date of Eid al-Fitr

Islam follows the lunar calendar, meaning Islamic months are based on the cycles of the moon. Since a lunar year is approximately 10-12 days shorter than the solar Gregorian year, the dates of Islamic holidays shift each year.

The sighting of the crescent moon on the 29th night of Ramadan determines whether Eid will be celebrated the following day or if fasting continues for one more day. In 2025, if the moon is sighted on March 29, Eid will be observed on March 30. Otherwise, it will fall on March 31, after a full 30 days of fasting.

## Historical Origins of Eid al-Fitr

Eid al-Fitr has its roots in the early days of Islam. According to Islamic tradition, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) instituted this festival in the second year of Hijrah (622 CE) after receiving divine revelations regarding Ramadan.

Historical accounts suggest that before Islam, pre-Islamic Arab societies celebrated different festivities, but Eid al-Fitr was introduced as a religiously sanctioned holiday, emphasizing gratitude and communal worship. The Prophet



encouraged Muslims to celebrate Eid with prayers, feasts, and acts of kindness, shaping the traditions that continue today.

## Rituals and Traditions of Eid al-Fitr

Eid al-Fitr is marked by a series of rituals and traditions that begin even before the day itself.

### 1. Zakat al-Fitr (Charitable Giving)

Before performing the Eid prayer, Muslims are required to give Zakat al-Fitr, a form of charity aimed at helping the less fortunate. This obligatory act ensures that everyone, including the poor, can participate in the festivities. The donation typically consists of staple food items such as rice, wheat, or dates, or an equivalent monetary contribution.

### 2. Eid Prayer (Salat al-Eid)

On the morning of Eid, Muslims gather in mosques or open prayer

grounds to perform the special Eid prayer. This prayer consists of two units (rak'ahs) and is often accompanied by a sermon (khutbah) emphasizing gratitude, forgiveness, and communal unity.

### 3. Festive Attire and Personal Grooming

It is customary to wear new or freshly cleaned clothes on Eid. Men often apply perfume, while women may adorn themselves with henna. Wearing the best attire symbolizes renewal and respect for the occasion.

### 4. Greeting and Embracing Loved Ones

The exchange of greetings such as "Eid Mubarak" (Blessed Eid) is an integral part of the celebrations. Families and friends visit one another, sharing hugs, gifts, and well-wishes.

### 5. Feasting and Special Foods

Eid is synonymous with feasting. Special dishes vary across cultures but

commonly include:

- **Sheer Khurma** (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh): A sweet vermicelli and milk-based dessert.
- **Maamoul** (Middle East): Date-filled pastries enjoyed with tea.
- **Ketupat** (Indonesia, Malaysia): Rice cakes wrapped in palm leaves.

## 6. Gifts and Eidi

Children eagerly anticipate Eidi, cash gifts given by elders as a token of love and blessing. Gift-giving extends beyond family, fostering a sense of generosity.

## 7. Acts of Kindness and Community Service

Many Muslims use Eid as an opportunity to visit orphanages, hospitals, or participate in food distribution drives, reinforcing the Islamic values of compassion and charity.

## Global Celebrations

While the essence of Eid remains the same worldwide, cultural diversity shapes the way it is celebrated.

### Middle East

In Saudi Arabia and the UAE, Eid begins with grand prayers in mosques, followed by extravagant feasts and public festivities. Fireworks and carnivals add to the joy, and traditional sword dances are performed in some regions.

### South Asia

In India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, vibrant bazaars fill up with shoppers ahead of Eid. Women apply intricate henna designs, and families gather for large meals. Traditional sweets like seviyan (sweet vermicelli) are widely enjoyed.

### Southeast Asia

In Malaysia and Indonesia, Eid (Hari Raya Aidilfitri) is marked by open houses where families welcome guests with delicacies like rendang (spiced meat dish) and lemang (glutinous rice cooked in bamboo).

### Western Countries

In the US, UK, and Canada, Muslims attend communal prayers and often organize interfaith events. Public festivals include halal food stalls, cultural performances, and carnival rides.

## The Modern Evolution of Eid

With advancements in technology and social media, Eid celebrations have evolved. Virtual gatherings allow distant families to connect, and online gifting has become popular. However, the core values of gratitude, charity, and community remain unchanged.

# Banana peels help getting rid of acne and wrinkles

Natural ingredients are for DIYs are ruling the beauty world right now. These are inexpensive, chemical-free and light on the skin. What those store-bought products can't do, these natural ingredients can do, without damaging the skin cells. One such ingredient is the banana peel.

It is the most neglected item in your house and is often regarded as worthless. With the use of banana peel, you can say goodbye to acne and wrinkles without spending oodles.

## How does it work?

Banana peel is high in lutein, an antioxidant and carotenoid vitamin related to Vitamin A. Lutein helps in protecting the skin against the damage done by the sun. Banana peel is high in esterified fatty acids, which are hard to find otherwise and constitute as one of the basic ingredients in many patent lotions.

With the use of banana peel, you can achieve an acne and wrinkle free skin. It has vitamins A, B, C, E, potassium, zinc, iron, and manganese that can reduce even the old acne marks. It hydrates your skin from the inside out and gives it a softer look. If you too want a naturally clear and younger looking skin, this is how you can get it.

## How to use?

Incorporating banana peel in your daily beauty regime is very easy. Just follow the given steps for a beautiful looking skin:

- First, prepare your skin. Use a mild cleanser to get rid of oil and dirt on the skin. Don't scrub or be harsh on your skin, especially if you have acne.
- Take a ripe banana and cut its peel into chunks and rub the inner part directly on the skin for 10 to 15 minutes in a circular motion.
- Keep a check if the peel is turning black from the inside.
- If that is the case, it means that the peel needs to be replaced now.



- Don't wash your face instantly.
- Let your skin absorb all the moisture for at least 4-5 hours. (You can do this before going to sleep so that it stays on your face overnight)
- Then rinse off with cold water.
- You can use banana peel daily for better results.

## Other benefits

Banana peel is rich in various minerals and vitamins which make it a perfect ingredient for resolving other skin related troubles as well. Here are some other benefits that you can reap from banana peel:

- It can be used to get rid of warts. Just tape the banana peel on the skin and leave it overnight. With continuous use, your warts will vanish.
- Because of high sugar content, it can help you with hemorrhoids.
- As it is high in natural moisture, it can treat eczema and psoriasis as well.

# Take care of your chemically-straightened hair

Maintaining chemically straightened is a tough task. You need to use a combination of the right tools and techniques to keep it healthy and supple.

## Avoid any heating products

The last thing you wanna do is damage your hair just after infusing it with chemicals! Remember that hair dryers and straightening irons exude heat. So hold off on these for as long as you can. If you absolutely must use a blow dryer, make sure you opt for the cold setting. Note: Showering with hot water is a total no-no; use lukewarm water instead so you don't end up stripping moisture.

## Condition daily, but use shampoo sparingly

Keep that fancy shampoo on the shelf and avoid eye contact as much as possible. Some veteran straightening divas even swear by the 'no shampoo philosophy.' But if you're too OCD for that, then at least make sure you cut down shampooing to every 2-3 days. Instead you should use conditioner daily for that shiny, straight look.

## protect your hair from sun and pollution

Those long afternoons at the poolside to get the perfect tan need to be managed differently now. The harsh sun's rays, coupled with the dusty air can really



damage your chemically treated hair. Here's a necessary purchase you can totally justify – a fancy sun hat, stylish scarf or fashionable umbrella. Who said you can't look cool while trying to look hot.

## Step up on haircut frequency

Did you know that Straight hair is probably the most prone to split ends? Make sure you don't forget to get that trim every four to six weeks to snip off split ends and keep them looking sharp and healthy.

## FOOD CORNER



# Italian Chicken

## Ingredients

4 Pieces of Chicken Breast, 2 Eggs ½ cup Maida, ½ cup Chicken Stock, ½ cup White Wine, 3 Tbsp Lemon juice, 2 Tbsp Olive Oil, 2 Tbsp Unsalted Butter, 2 sprigs Parsley Salt Pepper to taste

## Method

- Whisk eggs in a bowl and season it with salt and pepper and let it rest.
- Place the flour on a large plate and season that with salt and pepper and set aside.
- In another bowl, combine together chicken stock, lemon juice and white wine.
- Coat the chicken breast in flour, dip it in beaten egg and shallow fry it on a sauce pan. Cook for about 3 minutes till it turns golden brown. Now that the chicken is off the pan.
- And add the wine and stock mixture to the pan and let it cook for a few minutes until it reduces slightly and thickens, add some butter, parsley, salt and pepper, continue to cook. Now add the chicken breast back in the sauce and cook them together for just another minute. Serve it hot.

# Potato curry

## Ingredients

2 tablespoons vegetable oil, 1 medium onion, diced, 4 cloves garlic, minced, 4 teaspoons, curry powder, 1 ½ teaspoons paprika, 1 teaspoon cayenne, 2 teaspoons cumin powder, ½ teaspoon allspice, 2 teaspoons fresh ginger, minced, ½ teaspoon black pepper, 2 lb potato, peeled and cubed (907 g), 15 oz chickpeas, 1 can, drained (425 g), 1 cup vegetable broth (240 mL), 1 tablespoon lemon juice, 14 oz diced tomato, 1 can (395 g), 14 oz coconut milk, 1 can (415 mL), rice, cooked, for serving, naan bread, for serving, fresh cilantro, chopped, for garnish

## Method

- Heat the oil in a large pot over medium heat until shimmering. Add the onion and saute for about 3 minutes, until translucent.
- Add the garlic and saute for about 2 minutes, until fragrant.
- Add the curry powder, paprika, cayenne, cumin, allspice, ginger, salt, and pepper. Stir and cook for about 2 minutes until the spices are fragrant.
- Add the potatoes and mix well until well-coated in spices. Add the chickpeas and stir to incorporate.
- Add the broth, lemon juice, and tomatoes and stir, then pour in the coconut milk and stir to combine.
- Increase the heat to high and bring the mixture to a simmer. Once bubbling, reduce the heat to medium and cook for 15-20 minutes, until the potatoes are tender and easily pierced with a fork.
- Serve with cooked rice and naan and garnish with fresh cilantro.

# Healthy superfoods to boost your brain, memory and focus

Like our body, our brain also needs healthy nutrients to boost its cognitive function and overall health of our body. Though no magic pill can prevent cognitive decline, eating good food and including superfoods in your diet can ensure your brain stays healthy. In a video shared on Instagram, Dr Kunal Sood, double board certified MD and health content creator, emphasised eating superfoods that are good for your brain health. Here are some superfoods he suggested that everyone should eat to boost their brain health:

## Chia seeds

Chia seeds are a favourite superfood for those trying to boost their fibre intake or lose weight. But did you know they could also boost your brain health? High in omega-3s, per Dr Sood, chia seeds also provide essential fatty acids that support brain health and reduce neuroinflammation. "Their low glycemic index also helps maintain stable energy levels for optimal brain function," he added.

## Walnuts

Per Dr Sood, walnuts are great superfoods if your aim is to improve your brain health. It is packed with antioxidants and anti-inflammatory compounds that may help 'reduce oxidative stress and slow cognitive decline'. He added, "Studies suggest they improve brain function and may lower the risk of Alzheimer's."

## Blueberries

The second superfood is blueberries. "These tiny berries are rich in anthocyanins, which boost blood flow to the brain and enhance cognitive function," Dr Sood explained. Moreover, research shows that consuming blueberries can improve memory and brain activity in older adults, he added.

## Avocados

If you enjoy eating avocados, this is good news for you. Full of monounsaturated fats, carotenoids, and



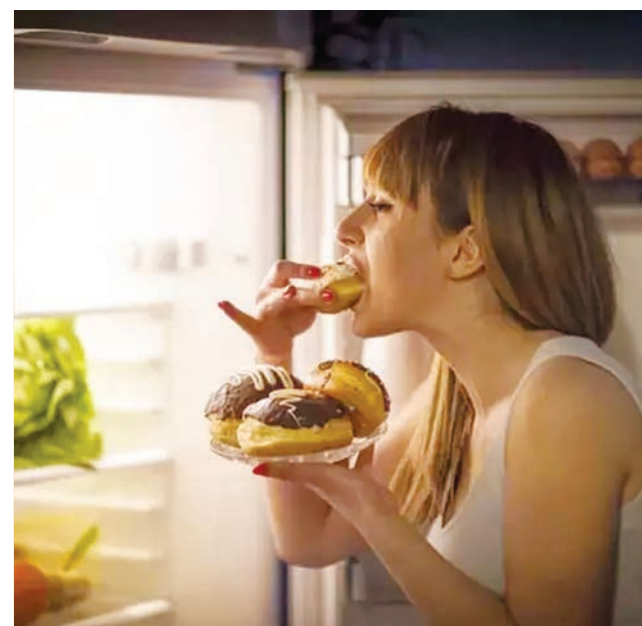
essential nutrients, avocados support brain function and may enhance cognitive performance. "One study found that daily avocado consumption improved attention and mental processing," Dr Sood said.

## Salmon

Salmon is a top source of omega-3 fatty acids (EPA and DHA). It helps reduce inflammation and supports memory, problem-solving skills, and executive function. Regular intake has been linked to increased grey matter in the brain.

## Dark chocolate

Craving dark chocolate may not just soothe your sweet cravings, but also boost your health. "Rich in polyphenols and flavonoids, dark chocolate enhances blood flow to the brain, boosting cognitive function and mental alertness. Plus, theobromine and caffeine give you an extra brain-boosting kick," Dr Sood explained. *Source: HT*



## Leptin resistance and how it affects your body

The secretion of the leptin hormone is a cue that your body is feeling full, and you should stop eating. However, many tend to overpass this, leading to chronic conditions like obesity, according to integrative health coach Dr Harshini Jain. "A lot of obese people are leptin resistant. They keep on hogging on food such that the body is not able to read the cue from the hormone," Dr Jain claimed.

Dr Manjusha Agarwal, senior consultant, internal medicine, Gleneagles Hospital Parel Mumbai, said leptin resistance is seen when the brain becomes less responsive to the leptin hormone, which is produced by fat cells. "This hormone helps regulate hunger and a person's energy spending. Regarding a healthy metabolic system, leptin signals to the brain that enough energy is stored in fat reserves, helping to control appetite and promote satiety after meals. However, ones with leptin resistance can have constant feelings of hunger and higher food intake, leading to piling up those excess kilos," explained Dr Agarwal.

Leptin resistance has been linked to "various health issues including obesity-related inflammation and an increased risk for chronic conditions like type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease", noted Dr Agarwal.

"Interestingly, factors such as sleep deprivation, stress, and diets high in processed foods can exacerbate the condition by contributing to systemic inflammation," said Dr Agarwal.

Dr Agarwal said that to deal with leptin resistance, avoid processed food, adhere to a well-balanced diet, exercise daily, get a minimum of 8-9 hours of sleep daily, and eat a protein-rich diet. "It is essential to take the help of an expert when it comes to diet and follow the guidelines to ensure you stay in top shape," said Dr Agarwal. *Source: The Indian Express*

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## Not BMI, waist size a crucial marker in predicting cancer in men

Researchers are now suggesting that waist circumference is a stronger predictor of cancer risk in men compared to body mass index.

The study, conducted by scientists from Lund University, Sweden, was published in The Journal of the National Cancer Institute.

Traditionally, BMI has been used to assess obesity-related cancer risks. However, researchers found that waist circumference, which measures fat around the abdomen, is a better indicator of cancer risk - especially for men.

The study analysed health data from 3,39,190 people in Sweden over nearly four decades.

A larger waist size (about 11 cm or 4.3 inches more) in men was linked to a 25% higher risk of developing obesity-related cancers.

In comparison, an increase in BMI was associated with a 19%



higher risk in men.

Even after adjusting for BMI, a higher waist circumference still predicted greater cancer risk in men, suggesting abdominal fat is particularly harmful.

In women, both waist circumference and BMI were similarly linked to cancer risk, with a 13% increase observed for both.

Researchers believe that men tend to store more fat around the abdomen (visceral fat), while women accumulate more fat under the skin and in peripheral areas.

Visceral fat is linked to inflammation and insulin resistance, both of which increase cancer risk. The study suggests that measuring waist size alongside BMI could improve cancer risk predictions, especially for men. For women, adding hip circumference to assessments may provide better insights into fat distribution and cancer risk.

"Our study provides evidence that waist circumference is a stronger risk factor than BMI for obesity-related cancers in men, but not in women. Waist circumference appears to provide additional risk information beyond that conveyed by BMI in men," the researchers concluded.

The reason waist size is not as strong a cancer risk factor for women as it is for men could be due to differences in how body fat and hormones affect cancer risk.

## Researchers develop technology that uses oxygen to charge batteries

A team of scientists has developed a groundbreaking technology that harnesses oxygen from the air to charge batteries, potentially revolutionizing energy storage solutions for portable devices, electric vehicles, and renewable energy applications.

The technology is based on an advanced electrochemical reaction where oxygen from the surrounding air acts as a catalyst in the battery's charging process. Unlike conventional lithium-ion batteries that rely on stored chemicals for energy transfer, this new system integrates an air-breathing electrode that captures and utilizes atmospheric oxygen to enhance energy conversion efficiency.

Researchers have designed a special cathode material that facilitates the absorption and release of oxygen, enabling continuous and sustainable battery charging. This innovative approach significantly reduces the need for heavy and expensive materials traditionally used in battery construction.

### Advantages

- **Increased Energy Efficiency** - By utilizing ambient oxygen, these batteries improve energy conversion rates, making them more efficient than conventional models.
- **Lightweight and Cost-Effective** - The absence of certain chemical components allows for lighter and potentially cheaper battery designs.
- **Environmentally Friendly** - This technology reduces reliance on finite mineral resources like lithium and cobalt, promoting sustainability.
- **Extended Battery Life** - Oxygen-assisted charging may lead to longer battery lifespans, reducing the need for frequent replacements.
- **Scalability** - The system has potential applications in various fields, from consumer electronics to large-scale energy storage for solar and wind power systems.

### Potential Applications

- **Consumer Electronics** - Smartphones, laptops, and wearables could benefit from prolonged battery life and lighter designs.
- **Electric Vehicles (EVs)** - By reducing the weight and cost of batteries, this technology could accelerate EV adoption worldwide.
- **Renewable Energy Storage** - Air-powered batteries could serve as efficient energy storage solutions for solar and wind farms.

# Life on Mars: Curiosity rover makes big discovery on Red Planet

Hunting for life in the desolate world of Mars, Nasa's Curiosity rover might have hit upon a jackpot. Scientists have found the largest chunk of organic compounds on the Red Planet to date.

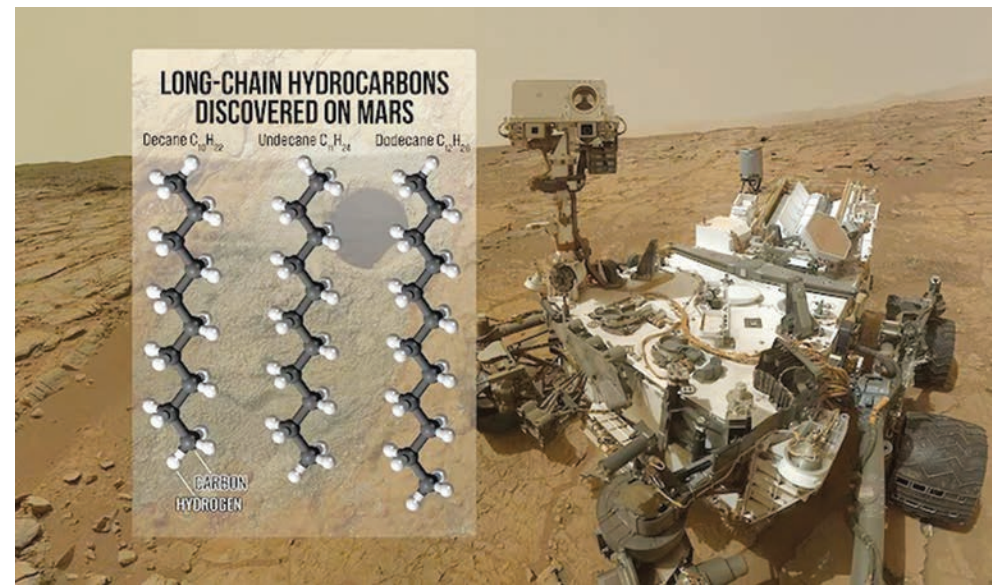
The compounds were found during the analysis of rock pulverised by Curiosity during its continuous science operation on the alien world.

The discovery suggests prebiotic chemistry may have advanced further on Mars than previously observed. The analysis revealed the presence of decane, undecane, and dodecane.

These are alkanes, which are saturated hydrocarbons consisting only of carbon (C) and hydrogen (H) atoms with single bonds. They belong to the paraffin series and are commonly found in petroleum and used as fuels and solvents.

They are thought to be the fragments of fatty acids that were preserved in the sample. Fatty acids are among the organic molecules that are chemical building blocks of life on Earth. While there's no way to confirm the source of the molecules identified, finding them at all is exciting for Curiosity's science team for a couple of reasons.

The findings, published in a paper in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, increases the chances that large organic molecules that can be made only in the presence of life, known as "biosignatures," could be



preserved on Mars.

"Our study proves that, even today, by analyzing Mars samples we could detect chemical signatures of past life, if it ever existed on Mars," Caroline Freissinet, the lead study author said in a statement.

Curiosity scientists had previously discovered small, simple organic molecules on Mars, but finding these larger compounds provides the first evidence that organic chemistry advanced toward the kind of complexity required for the origin of life on Mars.

Curiosity drilled the Cumberland sample in May 2013 from an area in Mars' Gale Crater called "Yellowknife

Bay." Scientists were so intrigued by Yellowknife Bay, which looked like an ancient lakebed, that they sent the rover there before heading in the opposite direction.

"There is evidence that liquid water existed in Gale Crater for millions of years and probably much longer, which means there was enough time for life-forming chemistry to happen in these crater-lake environments on Mars," said Daniel Glavin, a senior scientist.

Curiosity rover continues its exploration within Gale Crater on Mars, specifically investigating the slopes of Mount Sharp (Aeolis Mons).

## Google launches its AI model Gemini 2.5 Pro

Google has unveiled Gemini 2.5, its most advanced artificial intelligence model to date, marking a significant step-up in the AI world. This latest iteration introduces "thinking" capabilities, enabling the model to process tasks step-by-step and make more informed decisions. This approach enhances the model's ability to handle complex prompts, resulting in more accurate and contextually relevant responses.

In the announcement, Google states, "Gemini 2.5 Pro Experimental is our most advanced model for complex tasks. It tops the LMArena leaderboard — which measures human preferences — by a significant margin, indicating a highly capable model equipped with high-quality style. 2.5 Pro also shows strong reasoning and code capabilities, leading on common coding, math and science benchmarks."

All models in the Gemini 2.5 family, including future versions, are designed as "thinking models, capable of reasoning through their thoughts before responding, resulting in enhanced performance and improved accuracy." Google highlights that it is "building these thinking capabilities directly into all of its models" to enable them to



"handle more complex problems and support even more capable, context-aware agents."

Gemini 2.5 delivers a "new level of performance by combining a significantly enhanced base model with improved post-training," making it the most advanced iteration yet.

The first model in this series is Gemini 2.5 Pro (also known as gemini-2.5-pro-exp-03-25 and codenamed "nebula"). Designed for tackling complex tasks, Google states that it "tops the LMArena leaderboard — which measures human preferences — by a significant margin." Additionally, it leads in mathematics (AIME 2025) and science (GPQA diamond) benchmarks "without test-time techniques that increase cost, like

majority voting."

One of the most notable enhancements in this model is its advanced coding capabilities, described as "a big leap over 2.0" with "more improvements to come." Google further notes that "2.5 Pro excels at creating visually compelling web apps and agentic code applications, along with code transformation and editing."

In industry-standard agentic coding evaluations, Gemini 2.5 Pro achieves an impressive 63.8 per cent score on SWE-Bench Verified using a custom agent setup, reinforcing its strength in software engineering tasks.

Google has officially launched Gemini 2.5 Pro, now available in Google AI Studio and the Gemini app for Gemini Advanced users. The model will also be integrated into Vertex AI in the near future. Additionally, Google has announced that pricing details will be introduced in the coming weeks, allowing users to access higher rate limits for large-scale production use.

Gemini 2.5 builds upon the strengths of its predecessors, offering native multimodality and an extended context window. The 2.5 Pro version, available from today, supports a 1 million token context window, with an expansion to 2 million tokens coming soon.



# India set to double the investment limit for foreign individuals to 10%

India's central bank is set to double to 10% a cap on investment by individual foreign investors in listed companies, as it aims to boost capital inflows, according to two senior government officials and documents reviewed by Reuters.

Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs), pressured by poor earnings, high valuations and prospects of U.S. tariffs, have pulled more than \$28 billion out of Indian stocks since September's record high in the benchmark NSE Nifty 50.

To boost foreign investment, India is widening to all foreign investors benefits it had until now restricted to overseas Indians, while also raising applicable investment limits, the officials said.

"It is felt that these proposals may be implemented as early as possible," the central bank told the government in a letter last week, pointing to disruption in capital inflows among recent developments in the external sector.

Emails seeking comment from the finance ministry, the central bank, and the market regulator, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), did not get any response.

The plans envisage allowing all foreign individual investors to invest a maximum of 10% in a listed company, the document showed.

That is up from the 5% holding in an Indian company allowed to overseas Indian citizens by special rules under the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA). "Current foreign exchange management rules only mention non-resident Indians (NRIs) and overseas citizens of India (OCIs) under Schedule III," the second government official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

"We are broadening this to include all individual foreign investors."

The central bank, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), will also raise to 24% the combined holding limit for all overseas individual investors in an Indian listed company, from 10% now, the officials added.

The plan to hike foreign investor limits in Indian listed firms



is in the final stages of discussion between the government, the RBI, and SEBI, the officials said.

## Monitoring Challenges

While the government and the RBI favour the move, the market regulator has flagged some challenges in monitoring compliance with foreign investment limits.

It has warned that a single foreign investor holding of 10%, combined with associates, could exceed 34%, triggering takeover rules.

"Without effective monitoring across different frameworks, such takeovers may go undetected," SEBI cautioned the RBI in a letter last month.

Indian rules compel an investor who acquires more than 25% of a company to make an open offer for shares held by retail investors.

The government and regulators are now weighing these concerns before finalising the reforms.

"We are working to rationalise the rules to prevent the possibility of such arbitrage across regulations by the foreign investors," the second official said.

## Stock markets trade lower on weak global trends amid US tariff jitters

Benchmark indices declined in early trade on March 28 mirroring weak trends in the global markets amid uncertainties over Trump tariffs.

The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex declined 144.66 points to 77,461.77 in early trade. The NSE Nifty dipped 38.7 points to 23,553.25.

From the Sensex pack, Mahindra & Mahindra, Infosys, Power Grid, Sun Pharma, HCL Tech, Bajaj Finance, IndusInd Bank and Axis Bank were the major laggards.

Nestle, Hindustan Unilever, ITC and Kotak Mahindra Bank were among the gainers.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong were trading with deep cuts.

US markets ended lower on March 27.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 11,111.25 crore on March 27, according to exchange data.

"The market's resilience, despite Trump's reciprocal tariff threats, comes from the renewed buying by FIIs and the confidence this has given to the bulls," VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Investments Limited, said.

## 'Assassin's Creed' maker Ubisoft to create a Euro 4 billion subsidiary with Tencent

Prominent video game maker Ubisoft Entertainment announced that it will be creating a new subsidiary for its Assassin's Creed, Far Cry and Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six games with an enterprise value of about Euro 4 billion (\$4.3 billion).

Tencent Holdings Ltd. will invest Euro 1.16 billion to acquire a 25 per cent stake in this new entity, which will hold the licenses for the intellectual property of the games in exchange for a royalty, according to a Bloomberg report.

As a result, Ubisoft's US shares rose as much as 20 per cent. The closing price on the Nasdaq was \$15.79, which is an uptick of 9.39 per cent or \$1.355.

"This is a foundational step in changing Ubisoft's operating model that will enable us to be both agile and ambitious," Ubisoft CEO Yves Guillemot said in the statement.

This new unit's Euro 4 billion valuation is actually higher than the group's current enterprise value itself, of which Tencent already holds a 10 per cent stake.

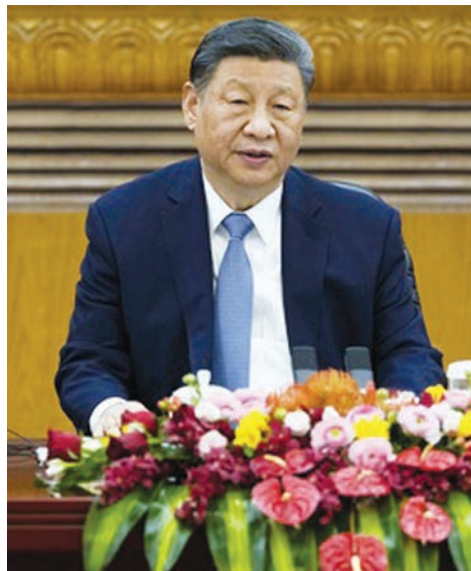
# Xi Jinping meets with global business leaders as China looks to woo investors

Chinese President Xi Jinping has met with a group of global business leaders in Beijing, in an effort to boost investor sentiment as rising tariffs fuel uncertainty for the economy and international trade.

Xi met with representatives of international industrial and business firms at the Great Hall of the People on March 28 morning, the official Xinhua News Agency reported without elaborating.

They include Rajesh Subramaniam of FedEx Corp, Bill Winters of Standard Chartered PLC, Paul Hudson of Sanofi SA, Pascal Soriot of AstraZeneca PLC and Miguel Angel López Borrego of ThyssenKrupp AG. Chinese officials in attendance include Foreign Minister Wang Yi, Commerce Minister Wang Wentao and Finance Minister Lan Fo'an.

Slowing growth and mounting geopolitical tensions have hurt the appeal of investing in the world's second-biggest economy, with inbound investment tumbling last year to its lowest in over three decades.



More headwinds may come next month, when the US is set to complete a review of Beijing's compliance with the phase-one trade deal struck during US President Donald Trump's first term and impose reciprocal duties globally.

Chinese Premier Li Qiang on Sunday said the country is prepared for "shocks

that exceed expectations" as the government targets an ambitious growth target of about 5% this year. Economists estimate that Beijing would need to unleash trillions of yuan in stimulus to hit that goal if tariffs surge.

China's interaction with the top business figures underscores the message it's been sending that the nation is open for business — contrasting itself with Trump's more protectionist "America First" policies.

Beijing is also trying to cast itself as a supporter of private enterprise, illustrated by Xi's high-profile meeting last month with entrepreneurs like Alibaba Group Holding Ltd. co-founder Jack Ma.

Many global CEOs had traveled to China for the annual China Development Forum and the Boao Forum for Asia, which concludes on Friday. The meeting marks an upgrade from earlier years when China's No. 2 official met executives on the sidelines of the CDF, although Xi broke precedent last year to meet a group of US businesspeople.

## WEEKLY HOROSCOPE - MARCH 31, 2025 TO APRIL 6, 2025

By Chirag Daruwalla - Son of Astrologer Bejan Daruwalla



BEJAN DARUWALLA AND CHIRAG DARUWALLA

## ARIES



Ganesha says this week some positive changes are visible for you. Your energy and confidence are at a high level at this time. Your hard work and dedication will be appreciated at the workplace, which can give you new opportunities for progress in your career. Your activity will also increase in social life. There is a good opportunity to spend time with friends and family. Their advice and support will help you make better decisions. In terms of health, you need to be a little cautious. Doing yoga and meditation will be beneficial to reduce mental stress. Keep positive thinking and keep faith in yourself. From an economic point of view, this week you may get some new financial opportunities. However, make a careful decision while investing. This week there will also be sweetness in love relationships. Try to spend more time with your partner, make it stronger. In this way, this week will be full of positivity and opportunities for you. Focus on your goals and try to achieve them.

## TAURUS



Ganesha says this week, some important opportunities will come in front of you for Taurus. Your ideas and decision-making abilities will be particularly strong at this time, allowing you to move in the right direction to achieve your goals. Activities will also increase in your social life this week. Spending time with friends and family will prove beneficial for your mental health. In business, the hard work you have done will now start bearing fruit. Your relationship with higher officials will strengthen, and you may get recognition in a particular project. Financially, this week will prove to be positive for you. There is a possibility of getting a profit from an old investment. In personal life, romantic moments will be experienced in love relationships. If you are single, you may meet someone new. Take care of your health, and make yoga or exercise a part of your routine. Focusing on self-care is important at this time. Move forward with positivity and confidence this week, it will be beneficial for you.

## GEMINI



Ganesha says this week will be full of many new possibilities for Gemini natives. The brilliance of your intelligence and communication skills will give you important opportunities during this time. Social networks will strengthen, and friendships will move in a new

direction, leaving behind the old things. This week, your hard work in the workplace is likely to yield good results. Maintain good relations with colleagues, as they can help you move forward. If you are working on new projects, keep your vision clear and try to listen to the ideas of the team. Your mental health will become a priority for you this week. Activities like meditation and yoga will bring you peace. Take care of yourself and stay away from stress. In personal life, spending time with your loved ones will make you happy, and family relationships will strengthen. Financial matters will also remain stable this week. Be patient while making financial plans. Participating in social activities will not only bring joy but will also create new contacts. Innovation and creativity will be your guide during this time. Positively accept this week and be ready to embrace whatever opportunity comes your way.

## CANCER



Ganesha says this week symbolizes mixed opportunities and learning experiences. This week you will get a chance to make some important decisions in your personal and professional life. Spending time with family will bring peace of mind. This week your emotions will be deep, so talk openly with your loved ones. The exchange of emotions will strengthen your relationship. Think of new ideas to bring innovation to the workplace. Collaborating with colleagues will improve your work. In terms of health, including meditation and yoga in your routine will give you mental energy. If there is tension in the mind about any issue, then share it with your close friends. This week communication will be important for you. Speak openly and listen to the opinions of others. You will get a chance to participate in family events, which will further increase the closeness between you and your family. Maintain positivity and patience, this week will bring many happy gifts for you.

## LEO



Ganesha says the time will be full of enthusiasm and energy for the Leo natives. You will experience positive changes in your life. Efficiency and creativity will increase, which will help you accomplish your objectives. This week, you will get a chance to spend a good time with family and friends. The support of your colleagues will help you reach new heights. Your ideas and perspectives can open the door to new opportunities. In terms of health, meditation and yoga will prove invaluable for you. You must maintain strong mental and physical health. In terms of the economy, be careful while making financial decisions. Only with concentration and planning will you be able to use your resources properly. Your presence and influence will increase in society. This week your confidence will also increase, which will enable you to

share your ideas without hesitation. Consider this week a golden opportunity to achieve your small goals. Take full advantage of this time full of positivity and courage.

## VIRGO



Ganesha says in this weekly horoscope, there are many signs of positive energy for Virgo natives. This week you will be able to maintain a balance in your personal and professional life. Your analytical ability and power to concentrate will help you make important decisions. Enjoy every little moment with family and friends, it is very important for your peace of mind. This is a good time to focus on your health; you can improve your energy by including yoga or meditation in your routine. Act smartly in financial matters and avoid any kind of risk. You may try to revive some old plans and get success in it. New information will be received in social life, which will help you to move forward personally and professionally. Communication skills will be very important for you this week, so maintain empathy and clarity in conversation. Overall, this week is going to strengthen your thinking and functioning. Move forward with a positive attitude and make the most of this time.

## LIBRA



Ganesha says this week, the time will be mixed for Libra natives. Your creativity and social skills will be the main attraction for you during this period. This will be a favorable time for collaboration and improving relationships at the workplace. Truth and clarity will be important in your conversations. A particular project needs attention, but make sure you move forward with a holistic approach. Your partners and friends will support you, so exchange ideas with them. In terms of health, you have to be mindful of your routine. Practicing yoga and meditation will improve your mental health. Try to listen to your inner voice this week, and spend some time in the direction your mind is going. This is also an excellent opportunity to take up a new hobby and face new experiences. Also, focus on honesty and communication in love relationships. This will add more depth to your relationship. At the end of this week, you will find yourself full of positive energy, which will open the doors of new possibilities for you.

## SCORPIO



Ganesha says this week is an important time for Scorpio natives. You need to focus on your inner feelings and desires. Some new opportunities may come in front of you, which you have to handle wisely. Spending time with friends and family will give you mental peace. This is the right time to bring novelty to positive relationships. Spend some quality time

with your loved ones and listen to them. Establishing communication will make the relationship even stronger. There may be some difficulties in the workplace, but with your hard work and dedication, you will overcome them. Also, pay attention to health. Do yoga and meditation for mental and physical health. It will give you energy and make your thinking clear. Be careful in financial matters - avoid unnecessary expenses and take care of your budget. Also, awaken your inner passion and try to adopt new activities in life. Taking an interest in a new art or hobby will give you happiness and satisfaction. Keep your intentions clear this week and channel your energy in a positive direction.

## SAGITTARIUS



Ganesha says Sagittarius, this week is full of enthusiasm and new possibilities for you. You will get some opportunities that will help you advance your career and personal growth. You can increase your learning ability and interest in research. Do not hesitate to express your thoughts clearly, as your words can have a deep impact on others. This is the time to increase your social circle and make new friendships. You will have to meet people who match your thinking and lifestyle. Keep in mind that you maintain positive energy around you, this will also keep your mood right. Family relationships will also be strengthened this week. Spend time with family members and share your thoughts. This will bring more closeness to your relationships. In terms of health, a little exercise and meditation will keep you mentally and physically healthy. Give yourself time and take the necessary rest. Overall, this week will bring new beginnings and positive changes for you. Try to take advantage of every opportunity.

## CAPRICORN



Ganesha says this week is the time for you to remove negativity and increase positive energy. This week offers a good opportunity to strike a balance in your personal and professional life. Teammates and family members will support your ideas, making you feel motivated to move forward. At work, there can be significant progress towards completing an old project. Present your ideas clearly; your hard work will pay off. However, keep in mind that it is important to pay attention to your health as well. Take some time for yourself and meditate to improve your mental health. In relationships, it is important to maintain openness and communication. If you are upset with an issue, share it with your partner or friend. This can be the time for a new beginning. This week, focus on your plans and slowly move towards realizing them. The hard work you put in will bring you satisfaction in your domestic and professional life.

## BIRTHDAY HOROSCOPE : MARCH 31 TO APRIL 6 BY VEDIC ASTROLOGER NASTUR BEJAN DARUWALLA

### MARCH 31

Ganesha says don't chase a career behind fame or money. Doing what you love can bring you success. You may be in a positive frame of mind, which may help you recognize proper growth opportunities. You may commit to multiple tasks simultaneously, which will likely improve your productivity in all aspects of life. This day may bring important events for you.

### APRIL 1

Ganesha says today may be the best day for you. Today your boss may be cooperative. You are likely to get a promotion for your consistent hard work. You may plan to go somewhere with your family. Today your enthusiasm may be at its peak and you may try something new at the workplace. Your communication with your colleague may be good, which may make you learn new things. Today you may witness a lot of changes, which may give you more time to relax and channel your positive energy. This is the right time to plan for the future.

### APRIL 2

Ganesha says this day may be very auspicious for you. You may be in a good position as far as professional and personal success is concerned. Peace and harmony may bring good progress in all areas of your life. Your happiness level may make solid progress in areas of concern today. Today you may enter a new phase of life. This phase may motivate you to work hard and be competitive. You may get a lot of success today. Your hard work may impress your boss. Today you may show interest in spiritual activities.

### APRIL 3

Ganesha says today may be a very promising day for you. Your communication skills may be able to impress everyone around you. Today you may be in a sociable mood, ready to network with people who can help both professionally and personally. Today you may lead the project at the workplace. You may start new tasks and show great ease in executing them. Today you may plan to go out somewhere with friends.

### APRIL 4

Ganesha says that today can be the best day for you. This day can bring a lot of opportunities at the workplace that can lead you to a good plan. Today your energy level can be at an all-time high, which will help you move forward. May this day bring a lot of happiness and joy in your life. Your day can start with a lot of positivity. You can dedicate your entire day to yourself and your interests. A changed attitude towards work can keep you ahead of your competitors.

### APRIL 5

Ganesha says that today can be the best day for you. You may be able to solve a problem at the workplace, which may make your boss happy. You can plan a business trip with your colleague. Today can be a good day, you can meet some new people in the office. You can learn something new from them and share different stories related to work. You can travel to a place where the weather is completely different.



VEDIC ASTROLOGER NASTUR BEJAN DARUWALLA

### APRIL 6

Ganesha says that today you may get good mental strength. You may enjoy working in the office. You are likely to implement new ideas in the family business. Today your hard work can help you implement the plan successfully. Today you may choose to work hard and the financial benefits you get today will remain with you for a long time. Today your love life can also be as great as your professional life.

Nastur Bejan Daruwalla is available for astrological consultations. He can be reached at [www.bejandaruwala.com](http://www.bejandaruwala.com) info@bejandaruwala.com | +91 81412 34275

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#### AQUARIUS



Ganesha says this week is going to open the door to new possibilities for you. You will be known for your creativity and innovation. This is the right time to share your ideas, as your words will have a powerful impact. Your social engagements will increase, leading to new connections. In terms of the economy, you can make some new plans. Calculate in which direction you have to move. If you are in a business, strengthen communication with colleagues. It will also be important to take care of your mental health this week. Relieve stress by adopting meditation and relaxation techniques. Refresh yourself by spending some time in your favorite activities amid the weekly hustle and bustle. In terms of love and relationships, listen to the voice of your heart. Communicate with your partner and try to understand their feelings. For single people, this can be a good time to start a new love affair. It is important to be health conscious. Take care of a balanced diet and regular exercise. This week is a time of change for you when you will be able to adapt yourself to new dimensions. Stay positive and welcome new opportunities.

#### PISCES



Ganesha says this week will highlight your emotional depth. You will get an opportunity to focus on your inner world. This is the time to understand yourself and move towards your dreams. This week you also need to pay attention to your relationships. With the blessings of the gods, you will be able to establish positive communication with your loved ones, which will further strengthen your

bonds. Your creativity and imagination will especially come to the fore at this time, which will also prove helpful in your professional life. Do not hesitate to share your ideas. In terms of health, maintaining mental balance will be important. Participating in activities like meditation and yoga will make you feel empowered. Participation in social activities can be beneficial for you, so do

not forget to meet new people and network. Listen to your inner voice this week and move forward with positivity.

#### AUTHOR BIO

Chirag Daruwalla is the best astrologer and one of the most famous names in the astrology world. He has more than 18 years of experience. Readers may seek his advice related to career, health, finance, business, money, love and marriage. He has complete knowledge, solutions, and guidance to all the problems related to life. Visit his website [chiragdaruwalla.com](http://chiragdaruwalla.com). He is available for consultations on WhatsApp number +91 8141566266 or by email: info@chiragdaruwalla.com

|| SHREE GANESHAY NAMA ||



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Nastur Bejan Daruwalla

CONTD FROM PAGE 1

## Russia's Putin says North Korea, BRICS should join Ukraine ceasefire talks

Ukraine under the auspices of the UN, the United States, European countries and our partners," Putin was quoted as saying.

"This would be in order to hold democratic elections and bring to power a capable government enjoying the trust of the people and then to start talks with them about a peace treaty," Putin said.

"We are for resolving all these issues by peaceful means," he said. "Yet, with removing the original causes that triggered the current situation," he added.

Putin also said other countries should be involved in the peace process beyond the US and Russia, including Moscow's treaty ally Pyongyang.

"This is not only the United States but also the People's Republic of China, India, Brazil, South Africa, all BRICS countries," Putin said.

"And many others, for example, including the Democratic People's Republic of Korea," he said, using North Korea's official name.

Pyongyang has sent more than 3,000 new troops to join Russian forces fighting in Ukraine, according to South Korea's military, topping the 11,000 sent last year, among which casualties are reported to have been catastrophic from the fighting with Ukraine's army.

Putin also said he was ready to work with Europe, as well, although it was "acting inconsistently, constantly trying to fool us".

"But it's OK, we have gotten used to it already. I hope we will make no mistakes based on excessive trust to our so-called partners," he said, according to TASS.

Praise was reserved for US President Donald Trump, who the Russian leader described as "sincerely wishing for the end of this conflict".

Putin's comments follow separate negotiations in Saudi Arabia's Riyadh this week between Russian, Ukrainian and US officials aimed at securing a temporary ceasefire.

According to the US, Kyiv and Moscow agreed to halt military strikes on vessels in the Black Sea, but in the days since, they have both accused each other of not taking the peace talks seriously.

Following the deal, Ukraine accused Russia of launching an overnight drone attack on the city of Mykolaiv, which Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy described as a "clear signal to the whole world that Moscow is not going to pursue real peace".

Russia separately accused Ukraine of carrying out a drone attack on a gas storage facility and a power installation in Russian-held territory, in contravention of an agreement to not attack each other's power facilities.

Russian media said a second round of talks is due to resume in Riyadh in mid-April. (Source: Al Jazeera and news agencies)

## U.S. Justice Department sting singses Hyderabad-based manufacturer of Fentanyl intermediary

2024. The exercise was repeated in August 2024 as part of the sting operation run by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration. The shipment invoice with the consignment, which forms part of the indictment document, which is partially redacted, lists the Hyderabad, Kavuri Hills address, with pin code 500033.

Two of Vasudha Pharma's top executives, Tanweer Ahmed Mohamed Hussain Parkar (63) who is Chief Global Business Officer and Venkata Naga Madhusudhan Raju Manthena (48), the Marketing Director, have been arrested in New York on March 20, 2025.

Another executive, Marketing Representative Krishna Vericharla (40) is still at large. The three were indicted earlier by the Department of Justice for manufacturing and distributing a chemical which is a Fentanyl precursor for unlawful import into the United States, and attempting and conspiring to do the same.

Vasudha Pharma was incorporated in 1994 and is an unlisted public company manufacturing Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (API) and Pharma

Intermediates. "By 2003-04, the company gained world class expertise and became the largest manufacturer of piperidone and piperidine derivatives," according to the website.

Two Indian companies charged with criminal conspiracies to import fentanyl precursor chemicals to U.S.

The indictment broadly painted India's pharmaceutical companies in unflattering light. "Certain chemical companies in India are global producers and distributors of fentanyl precursor chemicals. These companies supply fentanyl precursor chemicals to the United States and Mexico, among other places, where the chemicals are used to produce fentanyl or other controlled substances," read the indictment.

The indictment came two days after the United States' 2025 Annual Threat Assessment (ATA) report, a collective effort of the Intelligence Community's (IC) that banded India with China as countries enabling non-state actors in trafficking narcotics, including Fentanyl.

"Non-state groups are often enabled, both directly and indirectly, by state actors, such as China and India as sources of precursors and equipment for drug traffickers," says the ATA report adding, "China remains the primary source country for illicit fentanyl precursor chemicals and pill pressing equipment, followed by India."

One of the charges against Vasudha Pharma is that "VPC is a chemical manufacturing company located in Hyderabad, Telangana, India with a robust offering of chemicals, including fentanyl precursor chemicals such as N-BOC-4P, and an unabashed marketing strategy in which VPC directly markets and advertises the availability of these precursor chemicals at foreign trade shows, in marketing materials sent to potential customers, and on the company's website."

The vasudhapharma.com website includes the listing of the 4-tert Boc-4-piperidone with the Chemical Abstracts Service (CAS) registry number 79099-07-03 as one of its products in the piperidone and piperidine derivatives. According to scientific literature, one kg of this chemical intermediary yields about 1.83 kg of fentanyl, of which 2 mg can kill a human being.

## Senate Confirms Jay Bhattacharya as NIH Chief

One of the 13 agencies managed by HHS, the NIH is the largest supporter of biomedical research in the world. It funds around \$50 billion in scientific research via grants to hundreds of thousands of researchers at academic institutions and hospitals.

Trump nominated Bhattacharya in November 2024 to lead NIH.

The NIH, located in Bethesda, Maryland, includes 27 institutes focused on various aspects of health, including the National Cancer Institute, the National Institute of Mental Health, and the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, which Dr. Anthony Fauci headed up.

Bhattacharya said a key to restoring trust is to make NIH research more rigorous.

"NIH-supported science should be replicable, reproducible, and generalizable," he said, recalling a recent research integrity scandal within the agency that called into question the validity of some studies on Alzheimer's disease.

"NIH can and must solve the crisis of scientific data reliability."

## In her Oxford address, Mamata says her governance model doesn't allow discrimination

"When I am in the chair, I cannot divide society. I have to look after the weaker sections and the poor. We have to work hard for them. At the same time, we must work for all religions, castes, and creeds together, move forward with them, and help them," she said.

Ms. Banerjee, who heads the Trinamool Congress, was speaking on 'Social Development - Girl, Child and Women Empowerment in West Bengal'.

Pointing to West Bengal's diversity, she said people in



the state celebrate all festivals together without discrimination.

"We have about 11 crore people in our state -- almost like a big country. Our beauty lies in the fact that more than 33 per cent of our people belong to minority communities, including Muslims, Christians, Buddhists and Gorkhas. Around 6 per cent are tribals, and 23 per cent belong to Scheduled Castes. People of every caste, creed, and religion love each other," she said.

Ms. Banerjee underlined the need for a human-centric approach to governance.

"Our mission is to ensure that there is no discrimination among students, women, farmers, and workers. We must consider all people as human beings. Without humanity, this world cannot run, continue, or sustain -- I firmly believe so," she said. (Source: PTI)

## FIR lodged against Arvind Kejriwal for 'misusing' public money, Police informs court

The Judge on March 11 directed police to lodge the FIR on a complaint that has alleged violation of Prevention of Defacement of Property Act.

The court has listed the matter for April 18 for the next hearing after police sought time to investigate the matter.

Aside from Mr. Kejriwal, the court had ordered the FIR against former MLA Gulab Singh and then Dwarka councilor Nitika Sharma, for installing "large-sized" banners.

The complaint filed in 2019 alleged that Kejriwal, then Matiala MLA Gulab Singh (AAP) and then Dwarka A ward councilor Nitika Sharma "deliberately misused public money by putting up large-sized hoardings" at various places in the area.

# Sikh History This Week

MARCH 28 TO APRIL 3

## 28th March



1552 Gur Gadh Diwas, Sri Guru Amar Das Sahib.

1620 Guru Hargobind Ji had to marry Nanaki despite his refusal. This was an unfortunate upshot of the jubilation in Sikh community caused by Guru Sahib's release from seven years of incarceration. Within a few months two brides were pledged to him by their parents. Under the customs prevalent at that time, on Guru Hargobind's refusal, those girls would have remained unmarried throughout their life. So he had to marry Nanaki on March 28, 1620, and Mehrai also called Marwahi on July 10, 1620. The first incident occurred too close to his release. Taken aback at the second incident, he announced that no one should pledge his daughter to him in future.

1965 SGPC resolves at its general meeting to establish Punjabi Suba.

## 29th March



1552 Second Patshahi, Guru Angad Dev Ji departed this planet from Khadur Sahib. He served as Guru for 12 years and none months. Today is the actual date of joti jot, though its is observed on a different date by Guru Khalsa Panth.

1552 Third Patshahi, Guru Amar Das Ji ascended to Guruship of Sikhism. Amardas was influenced to Sikhism by Bibi Amro, daughter of Guru Angad Dev Ji. She was married to Amardas's nephew. Bibi Amro was a very pious woman. She would get up early in the morning, take a bath and start reciting the hymns of Guru Nanak. One day Amardas heard Bibi Amro sing Guru Nanak's Jap Ji and pauris of Asa-di-var. He was touched by the divinity and peity of the hymns. He learnt those gymns from her and started reciting them every morning.

1699 Baisakhi day, Guru Gobind created the Khalsa order at Anandpur Sahib. Earlier Hukammahs were sent to Sikhs all over Hindustan and beyond to visit

Anandpur. The people were asked to visit with their hair unshorn. The hill chiefs, who, according to one account, were taken into confidence about Guru's program, were present in strength. He Abolished the corrupt and debased institution of 'masands'. Created a small regular army and fortified Anandpurs with a ring of smaller fortresses around it.

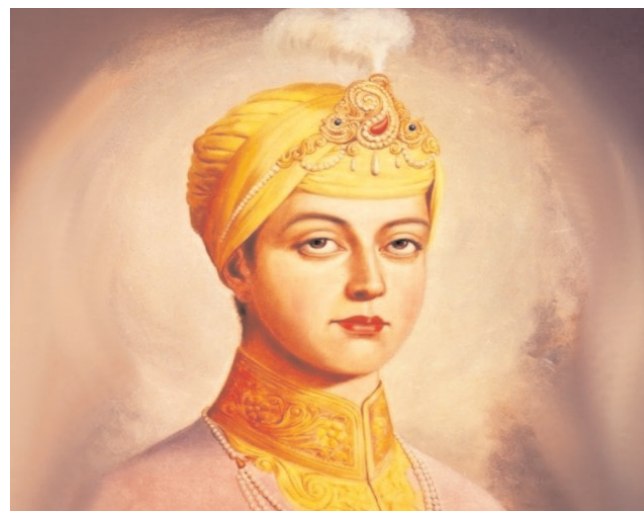
1748 The Sikhs assembled at Amritsar on Baisakhi day and by a gurmatta, decided to form Dal Khalsa by reorganization of over 60 arms jathas, bands, into eleven associatios (misls) under the overall command of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. Nawab Kapur Singh because of his age sought retirement from active overall leadership.

1922 Akali Dal renamed as "Shiromani Akali Dal".

1940 The Khalsa National Party at its meeting in Lahore, under Sunder Singh Majithia, saw danger in the division of India into Hindu and Muslim independent states, and said that the Sikhs would not tolerate for a single day the unadultrated communal rule of any community. As a logical sequence, it asked for restoration of Sikh sovereignty of Punjab, which was held in trust by the British during the minority reign of Maharaja Dalip Singh.

1981 SGPC adopted the motion "Sikhs are a Nation". When the Presdient Gurcharan Singh Tohra, was asked the question that the SGPC was turning political, he answered "On October 10, 1946, Ishar Singh Mahjaiol, had moved in the house a resolution for the creation of a Sikh State. The resolution was seconded by Sardar Swaran Singh. The "Sikhs Are a Nation" proposal was part of S. Ganga Singh Dhillon's speech at 54th All India Sikh Educational Conference that took place on March 13, 14, and 15, 1981. In his presidential address, S. Ganga Singh Dhillon wrote: "SIKHS ARE A NATION We all are born equal, with a human right to preserve our religious and cultural heritage, improve our economic inheritance and freedom to mould our destiny.

## 30th March



1664 Patshahi Eighth, Guru Harkrishan Ji, left this planet for heavenly abode from Delhi. He was eight years of age, when he took over on himself the sufferings and sins of the people of Delhi. As a result, he left for heavenly abode. Today is the actual date of joti joot, though it is observed differently by Guru Khalsa Panth.

## 31st March

1504: Second Patshah, Guru Angad Dev Ji came to this earth. He was born at matae di saran, Mukatsar, district Ferozpur in the house of Pheru Mal and Matta

Sabrai. His given name prior to Guruship was "Lehna." Today is the actual date of birth even though Guru Khalsa Panth observes it on a different date. Guru ANGAD DEV (1504-1552): The mantle of the First Master fell on Angad, the second Sikh Guru, in 1539, and he graced the exalted position till 1552.

1519: Lehna, Guru Angad Dev Ji, got married to Mata Khivi, daughter of Devi Chand of village Sangar.

1785: Sikhs signed a treaty with Maharathas.

1973: The regular Kar Sewa of Amritsar sarowar, sacred pool of water, at Darbar Sahib, was performed.

1979: Elections to the SGPC were held. During these elections, the Badal government used government machinery to defeat Amrik Singh, then President of the Sikhs Students Federation. Numerous bogus votes were polled in favor of Jiwan Singh Umranangal.

## 1st April

1621 Ninth Patshah, Guru Tegh Bahadur came to this planet. He was the youngest son of Guru Hargobind and Mata Nanaki, born in Guru's place at Amritsar. He had four brothers, Baba Gurditta, Baba Suraj Mal, Baba Ani Rai, and Baba Atal and a sister Bibi Viro. Guru Hargobind visted the new born child in the palace and prophesied that he would be very brave, fearless and a champion for the cause of truth. The child was named Tiaag Mal and subsequently, upon his show of bravery during Guru Hargobind Sahib Ji's battles, was renamed Tegh Bahadur (Tegh — for sword, power of justice and Bahadur – brave). Today is the actual date of birth, although it is observed by Guru Khalsa Panth on a different date.

## 2nd April

1757 Timur Shah (son of Ahmad Shah) and Jahan Khan (Governor of Lahore) attacked Sri Harmandir Sahib, destroyed Sri Darbar Sahib and completely filled sarowar with debris. During the 4th invasion of Ahmad Shah in 1756-7, he reached Delhi and systematically plundered the city. But he was forced to returned back due to outbreak of cholera epidemic in his troops> During this invasion, Sirhind was annexed to his empire. Ala Singh of Patiala submitted to Ahmad Shah. But the Sikhs attacked Timur Shah at Sunam and relieved him of half of his treasure. Sikhs also attacked the rear of Afghan troops and relieved them of a lot of their loot. As a result, the infuriorated Ahmad Shah sent an expedition against the Sikhs that destroyed Sri Harimandir Sahib and filled the holy tank with debris.

1809 Treaty of Amritsar signed between Maharaja Ranjit Singh and the British. Maharaja Ranjit Singh desired to be the overlord of all Sikh States. The British gave protection to Cis-Sutlej States and confined Maharaja Ranjit Singh to Sutlej and thus came very close to Lahore. After quite a bit of sabre rattling Maharaja Ranjit Singh succumbed to British pressure. This treaty was a major defeat for Maharaja Ranjit Singh at the hands of the British. Maharaja Ranjit Singh withdrew his forces from Faridkot and Malerkotla.

1850 The Sikh forces of Maharaja Ranjit Singh were disbanded, approximately a year after the East Indian Company gained controled of Punjab on Mar. 29, 1849.

## 3rd April

1775: The foundation stone of Harmandir Sahib was laid for the 2nd time by Jassa Singh Ahluwalia.

1947: Patel announced the formation of Sikhstan after independence.

1984: Sikhs were attacked by Central Reserve Police during Harbans Lal Khan's funeral procession and left 8 Sikhs dead.

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# Gudi Padwa - The Celebration of Hindu New Year

**G**udi Padwa is a vibrant festival celebrated predominantly in Maharashtra, marking the beginning of the Hindu New Year. It is observed on the first day of the Chaitra month according to the Hindu lunisolar calendar, which usually falls in March or April. This auspicious occasion is also known as Samvatsar Padvo in some regions and is celebrated with great enthusiasm and devotion.

## Significance of Gudi Padwa

Gudi Padwa holds immense cultural and religious significance. It is believed to commemorate the day when Lord Brahma created the universe. According to Hindu mythology, this day also marks the victory of Lord Rama over Ravana, symbolizing the triumph of good over evil. The festival is considered highly auspicious for new beginnings, making it a popular time for starting new ventures and making important life decisions.

## Traditional Celebrations

The festival is observed with various customs and traditions, including:

### Raising the Gudi

A 'Gudi' is a decorated flag-like arrangement that consists of a bamboo stick adorned with a bright silk cloth, neem leaves, mango leaves, and a garland of flowers. A copper or silver pot is placed upside down on top of the stick, symbolizing victory and prosperity. This Gudi is hoisted outside homes, especially near the entrance, as a harbinger of good fortune and success.

### Rangoli and Festive Decorations

Homes are thoroughly cleaned and beautifully decorated with intricate rangoli designs at the entrance. Mango leaves and marigold flowers are used to adorn doors and windows, creating a festive atmosphere.

### Special Festive Foods

Traditional dishes play a crucial role in the Gudi Padwa celebrations. One of the most popular delicacies prepared on this occasion is Puran Poli, a sweet flatbread stuffed with a mixture of jaggery and lentils. Another special dish is Shrikhand with Puri, which adds sweetness to the celebrations. A unique part of the festival is consuming a mixture of neem leaves, jaggery, and tamarind, symbolizing the balance of life's bitter and sweet experiences.

### Prayers and Cultural Events

Devotees visit temples to offer prayers and seek blessings for prosperity and happiness. Many cultural programs, processions, and



## IMPORTANT INFORMATION

**Gudi Padwa 2025**  
**Sunday, 30 March 2025**

**Did you know : Gudi Padwa is considered to be the beginning of the Hindu New Year.**

traditional dance performances are organized, showcasing the rich heritage of Maharashtra.

### Gudi Padwa and Chaitra Navratri

Gudi Padwa also marks the beginning of Chaitra Navratri, a nine-day festival dedicated to the worship of Goddess Durga. This Navratri, also known as Vasant Navratri, is an important time for spiritual devotion and fasting. Devotees observe fasts, perform pujas, and recite scriptures such as the Durga Saptashati to seek divine blessings. Each day of Navratri is dedicated to a different form of Goddess Durga, culminating in Ram Navami, the birthday of Lord Rama. The connection between Gudi Padwa and Chaitra Navratri signifies the renewal of life, purity, and spiritual awakening.

### Rituals of Chaitra Navratri

- Kalash Sthapana (Ghatasthapana): The festival begins with the installation of a sacred pot (kalash) filled with water and topped with mango leaves and a coconut, symbolizing prosperity and divine energy.
- Nine Days of Worship: Each of the

nine days is dedicated to a different form of Goddess Durga, such as Shailaputri, Brahmacharini, Chandraghanta, Kushmanda, Skandamata, Katyayani, Kalaratri, Mahagauri, and Siddhidatri.

- Fasting and Devotion: Many devotees observe fasts, consuming only fruits and milk, while others follow a sattvic diet without onions, garlic, or non-vegetarian food.
- Kanya Pujan: On the eighth or ninth day, young girls, symbolizing the divine feminine energy, are worshiped and offered food and gifts as a mark of reverence.
- Ram Navami Celebrations: The ninth day coincides with Ram Navami, celebrating the birth of Lord Rama. Devotees chant hymns, read the Ramayana, and visit temples to offer prayers.

### Regional Variations

While Gudi Padwa is widely celebrated in Maharashtra, other Indian states also observe the Hindu New Year in different ways:

- Ugadi in Karnataka, Telangana, and Andhra Pradesh
- Cheti Chand among the Sindhi

community

- Navreh in Kashmir
- Puthandu in Tamil Nadu
- Vishu in Kerala

Gudi Padwa is a festival that brings together tradition, joy, and hope for a prosperous year ahead. It is a time to embrace new beginnings, cherish cultural heritage, and celebrate the spirit of victory and renewal. Whether through vibrant decorations, delicious food, or sacred rituals, the essence of Gudi Padwa remains a reminder of the cyclical nature of life and the promise of a bright future. With the festival also marking the beginning of Chaitra Navratri, it adds an extra layer of devotion and celebration, reinforcing spiritual significance and the power of new beginnings. The observance of Chaitra Navratri alongside Gudi Padwa amplifies the spiritual energy of this period, making it a truly auspicious time for prayers, reflection, and seeking divine blessings.

## Importance of Gudi Padwa

Gudi Padwa marks the arrival of spring and the harvesting of Rabi crops. This festival is associated with the mythological day that Lord Brahma created the universe on this day. In this, not only Brahmaji and the main gods and goddesses of the creation created by him, Yaksha-demons, Gandharvas, sages, rivers, mountains, animals-birds and insects, diseases and their remedies are also worshiped. New Samvatsara starts from this day. Hence this date is also called 'Nav Samvatsara'.

In Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Maharashtra, all the houses are decorated with turbans from the leaves of the mango tree. Along with the desire for a happy life, this bandanavar is also a sign of prosperity, and a good harvest. Panchang is prepared on the day of 'Ugadi'. The great mathematician Bhaskaracharya composed the 'Panchang', calculating the day, month and year from sunrise to sunset from this day.

## Beliefs related to Gudi Padwa

A potter's boy named Shalivahan created an army of clay soldiers and by sprinkling water on them breathed life into them and with the help of this army defeated the mighty enemies. Shalivahana Saka started as a symbol of this victory.

It is believed that on this day Lord Rama liberated the people of the south from the tyrannical rule of Vanaraja Bali. The people who were freed from the troubles of Bali hoisted the flag after celebrating from house to house. Even today the practice of erecting Gudi in the courtyard of the house is prevalent in Maharashtra. That is why this day was named as Gudipadwa.

# Chaitra Navratri: The Festival of Nine Nights

**Chaitra Navratri is not just a religious observance but a festival of rejuvenation, faith, and cultural richness. It serves as an occasion for self-discipline, spiritual growth, and celebration of divine energy. Whether through fasting, rituals, or cultural festivities, Chaitra Navratri continues to hold a special place in the hearts of millions, reaffirming the timeless traditions of Hinduism. The festival reminds us of the power of faith, devotion, and the eternal presence of divine energy in our lives.**

Chaitra Navratri is a significant Hindu festival celebrated over nine days in the Hindu lunar month of Chaitra, which typically falls in March or April. The festival is dedicated to the worship of Goddess Durga and her nine divine forms. It marks the beginning of the Hindu New Year in several regions of India and is observed with great devotion, fasting, rituals, and cultural festivities.

Chaitra Navratri is the first of the two Navratris celebrated in a year, the other being Sharad Navratri in the autumn. While both festivals are dedicated to Goddess Durga, Chaitra Navratri also coincides with the arrival of spring and is considered a period of renewal and purification.

## Significance of Chaitra Navratri

Navratri means "nine nights," during which devotees seek the blessings of the Goddess for prosperity, health, and happiness. Chaitra Navratri is also known as Vasant Navratri because it coincides with the onset of spring. The festival holds immense spiritual significance, symbolizing the victory of good over evil and the purification of mind and soul.

## Spiritual Importance

Each day of Chaitra Navratri is dedicated to a different form of Goddess Durga, who represents various aspects of divine feminine energy. Worshiping her during this time is believed to help devotees overcome obstacles, cleanse their karma, and attain spiritual progress. The festival also emphasizes the importance of inner discipline, devotion, and self-control.

## Astrological Significance

Chaitra Navratri falls during the transition from winter to summer, which is considered an auspicious time for new beginnings. Many people start new ventures, businesses, or personal endeavors during this time. The planetary positions during Navratri are believed to enhance spiritual energies, making meditation and prayer more effective.

## Mythological Background

According to Hindu mythology, Navratri is associated with the legend of Goddess Durga's battle against the demon Mahishasura. Each of the nine days represents a different form of the Goddess, known as Navadurga. Chaitra Navratri also celebrates the birth of Lord Rama, as Ram Navami, the ninth day of the festival, marks his birth.

## The Legend of Mahishasura

Mahishasura, a powerful demon, had



received a boon that made him invincible against gods and men. His tyranny spread across the three worlds, leading the divine beings to seek the help of Goddess Durga. She fought Mahishasura for nine days and nights, ultimately slaying him on the tenth day, symbolizing the triumph of righteousness over evil.

## Connection to Lord Rama

Chaitra Navratri is also significant for

Vaishnavites, as it culminates in Ram Navami, the birth anniversary of Lord Rama, the seventh incarnation of Lord Vishnu. Devotees recite the Ramayana, visit temples, and participate in religious processions to honor Lord Rama's legacy of dharma (righteousness) and devotion.

## The Nine Days of Chaitra Navratri

Each day of Navratri is dedicated to one of the nine forms of Goddess Durga,

also known as Navadurga:

- Shailputri (Day 1) - She represents strength and purity. Depicted riding a bull and carrying a trident and lotus, she is the daughter of the Himalayas and the embodiment of stability. Worshiping her bestows strength and resolve. She is associated with the Muladhara (root) chakra, which signifies grounding and stability.
- Brahmacharini (Day 2) - She symbolizes devotion, penance, and perseverance. She holds a rosary and a water pot, signifying spiritual knowledge and meditation. Devotees seek her blessings for wisdom and inner peace. Her worship enhances patience, self-restraint, and the ability to face challenges with determination.
- Chandraghanta (Day 3) - She is the warrior form of Durga, depicted with a crescent moon on her forehead and riding a tiger. She represents bravery and protection against evil forces. Her worship removes fear and instills courage. She is believed to activate the Manipura (solar plexus) chakra, empowering devotees with self-confidence and determination.
- Kushmanda (Day 4) - Believed to be the creator of the universe, she is associated with divine radiance and cosmic energy. She holds a rosary, symbolizing her power to bestow longevity and strength to devotees. Worshiping her enhances mental clarity, creativity, and vitality.
- Skandamata (Day 5) - The mother of Lord Kartikeya (Skanda), she is a symbol of motherly love and divine grace. She is depicted with her child and is worshiped for wisdom and prosperity. She governs the Vishuddha (throat) chakra, promoting communication, wisdom, and clarity of thought.
- Katyayani (Day 6) - Known as the fierce warrior goddess, she was born to sage Katyayana. She slayed Mahishasura, representing the destruction of ignorance and evil. Her worship is believed to remove obstacles and bless devotees with courage and happiness. She governs the Ajna (third-eye) chakra, which enhances intuition and insight.
- Kalaratri (Day 7) - The fiercest form of Goddess Durga, she destroys negativity and darkness. She is depicted with a dark complexion and a fearless posture, symbolizing the power to overcome challenges and fears. She governs the Sahasrara (crown) chakra, which leads to spiritual enlightenment and liberation.



- Mahagauri (Day 8) - She represents purity, wisdom, and serenity. Worshiping her removes past sins and helps devotees attain tranquility and fulfillment. She is believed to cleanse and purify the soul, bringing inner peace and divine blessings.
- Siddhidatri (Day 9) - The final form of Durga, she grants supernatural powers (siddhis) to her devotees. She symbolizes spiritual realization and enlightenment, completing the cycle of devotion and self-purification.

### Rituals and Traditions

#### Havan (Sacred Fire Ceremony)

Many devotees perform havan (fire rituals) to invoke divine blessings. This ritual involves offerings of ghee, herbs, and grains into a sacred fire while chanting mantras.

#### Akhand Jyoti (Eternal Flame)

An oil lamp is kept burning continuously for nine days in many households as a mark of devotion and divine presence.

#### Regional Variations

- North India: Fasting, Kanya Puja, and Ram Navami celebrations are prominent.
- Maharashtra: Gudi Padwa is celebrated alongside Chaitra Navratri.
- West Bengal & Assam: Smaller-scale Durga pujas are performed.
- South India: Focus is on temple prayers and community gatherings.

#### Historical References

Ancient texts like the Devi Mahatmya and Markandeya Purana emphasize the importance of Navratri and describe the cosmic battle between Goddess Durga and Mahishasura. The tradition of Navratri has been followed for centuries, with various kings and rulers, including the Chola and Rajput dynasties, observing elaborate Durga worship during this period.

#### Chaitra Navratri and the Hindu New Year

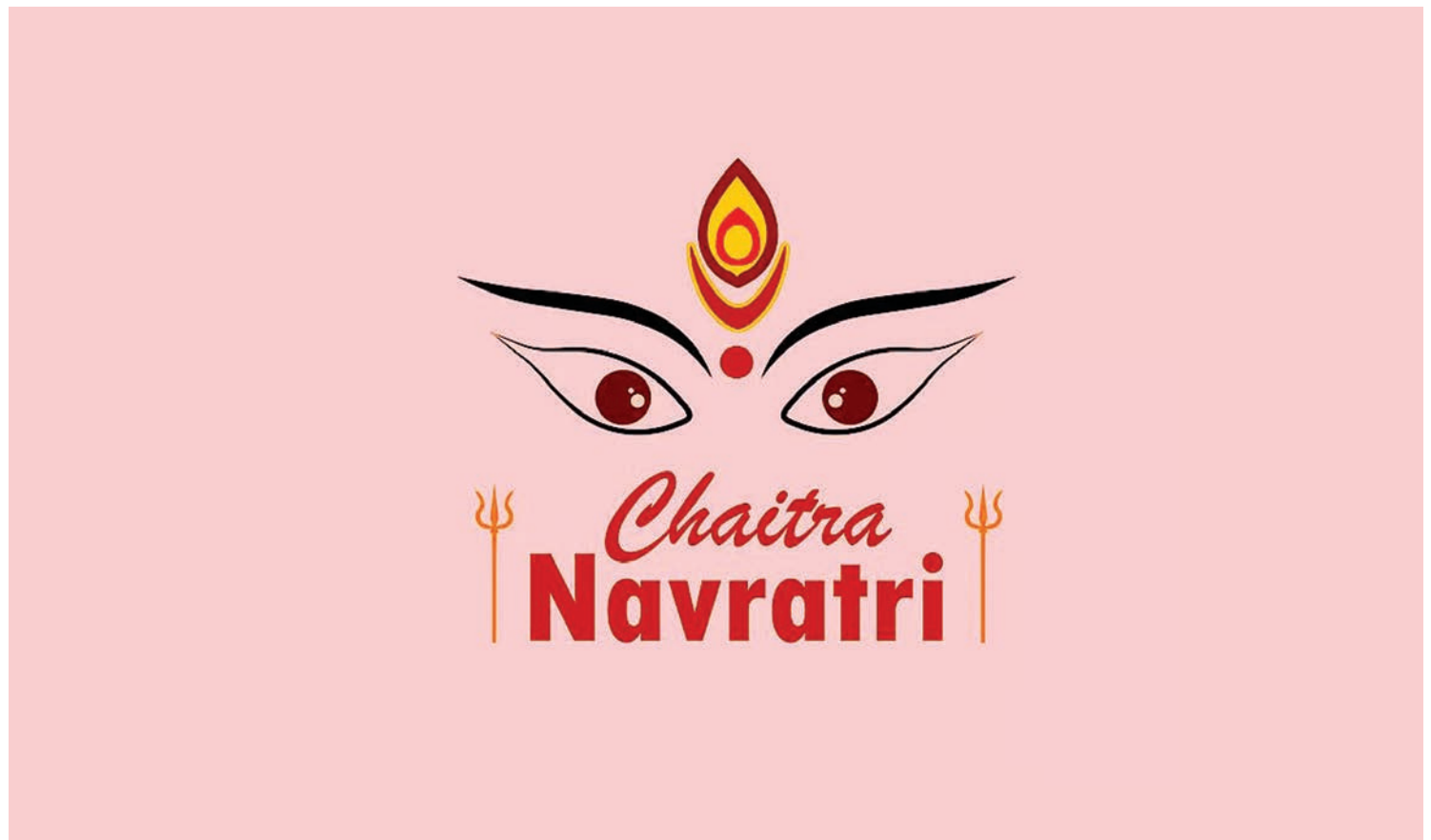
Chaitra Navratri marks the beginning of the Hindu New Year in many parts of India. The first day of Chaitra Navratri is observed as Gudi Padwa in Maharashtra and Ugadi in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana. These festivals signify the start of a new year according to the lunisolar Hindu calendar.

#### Hindu Calendar Significance

Chaitra is the first month of the Hindu lunisolar calendar, and the festival symbolizes new beginnings, prosperity, and the renewal of life. According to Hindu mythology, Lord Brahma is believed to have created the universe on this day. The New Year celebrations during Chaitra Navratri are marked by temple visits, prayers, and cultural festivities that emphasize spiritual renewal.

#### Regional Celebrations of Hindu New Year

- Maharashtra (Gudi Padwa): People raise a "Gudi" (decorated flag)



outside their homes as a symbol of victory and prosperity.

- Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana (Ugadi): Special dishes like Ugadi Pachadi, which has six flavors symbolizing different emotions of life, are prepared.
- Punjab (Baisakhi): Though celebrated later in April, Baisakhi is considered a harvest and New Year festival in Punjab.
- Kashmir (Navreh): The Kashmiri Hindu New Year is observed with prayers and the preparation of a traditional platter with sacred items.
- Sindhi Community (Cheti Chand): This marks the New Year and the birth of Jhulelal, the patron saint of Sindhis.

### Key Differences Between Chaitra and Sharad Navratri

Navratri, meaning "nine nights", is a Hindu festival celebrated twice a year with great zeal and enthusiasm. The festival is spread over nine days and each day is dedicated to a different form of Goddess Durga, known as Navdurga. The most widely observed Navratri falls in the month of October or November and is known as Sharad Navratri, marking the onset of the autumn season. In both the Navratris, Goddess Durga is worshipped in her various forms. The festival is characterised by vibrant celebrations, including fasting, dancing, and elaborate rituals performed in temples and households across India.

Let's understand the key difference between Chaitra and Sharad Navratris.

Chaitra Navratri, also known as Vasant Navratri, occurs in the Hindu month of Chaitra, typically falling in March or April. It heralds the arrival of spring, symbolising rejuvenation, fertility and new beginnings. While Chaitra Navratri shares the same essence as its counterpart, it holds distinct cultural and regional significance. This Navratri culminates



with Ram Navami, the birthday of Lord Rama, adding a layer of devotion to the festivities. Sharad Navratri is the more popular among the two. It is celebrated during Ashwin Masa (Hindu calendar month) - the beginning of winter in September or October. This Navratri also signifies slaying of demon Mahishasura by Goddess Durga and the 10th day is celebrated as Vijaydashami, also the day on which Lord Rama won the battle against Ravana and recovered Goddess Sita.

One of the primary differences between Navratri and Chaitra Navratri lies in their timing and seasonal context. Sharad Navratri occurs in the autumn season, whereas Chaitra Navratri aligns with the onset of spring. Each season

brings its own symbolism and significance, with autumn representing harvest and abundance, while spring symbolises renewal and growth. Consequently, the rituals and customs associated with each Navratri vary based on these seasonal influences.

While both Navratri celebrations share common rituals such as fasting and prayers, they also exhibit distinct cultural traditions. During Sharad Navratri, communities across India participate in the lively Garba and Dandiya Raas dances. In contrast, Chaitra Navratri festivities may include special puja ceremonies dedicated to Goddess Durga or visits to sacred sites associated with her worship, depending on regional customs.

# Dr. Varun Jeph, India's Deputy Consul General in New York, Honored for Dedicated Service at Special Farewell Celebration

MARCH 22, 2025

**SOUTHBOROUGH, MA (TIP):** A heartfelt farewell ceremony was held to honor Dr. Varun Jeph, India's Deputy Consul General (DCG) in New York Consulate, for his exceptional service over the last four years, at the home of Mohan and Shyama Nannapaneni in Southborough, Massachusetts. The special ceremony was organized by the Foundation of Indian Americans - New England (FIA-NE) and Team Aid. Leaders of nearly 25 organizations of the Indian American community in New England joined to express gratitude for Dr. Jeph's selfless service over the last four years, which included the period of Covid pandemic - one of the most challenging times in recent history.

Dr. Varun Jeph's tenure as DCG of India in New York Consulate was marked by several noteworthy accomplishments by the New York Consulate, such as the safe return of Indian nationals during the Covid pandemic; support for organization of consular camps in all states under the jurisdiction of the New York Consulate; beginning of International India Day Parade in Boston Harbor, at the location of the Boston Tea Party, which ties the American Revolution with India's Independence Movement; and the announcement by India's honorable Prime Minister Shri. Narendra Modi about opening of a new consulate of India in Boston to serve the New England region.

Among the distinguished community leaders who joined the farewell reception for Dr. Varun Jeph were New Hampshire State Representative Santosh Salvi, VHPA President Kaushik Patel, Sandeep Asija ( FIA-BOT) IAGB President Tanu Phenix, TAGB President Anil Potluri, IAB President Deepa Agarwal, past President of UIA-NE Neela Gandhi, past Presidents of Gurudwara Committee Sarpreet Singh and Malkit Singh, Ekal Vidyalaya Executive Director Manisha Jain, Ekal Vidyalaya New England Chapter Presidents Virendra and Nisha Baba, Ayoti Foundation President Sunaina and Kamal Chauhan, Romy

Selhi( Apna Bazar), Adopt-a-Village President Dr. Saraswati, Rahat Foundation founder Sonali Doshi, Meena Bharat and Dr. Amitabha Lala from the Bengali Association. Other prominent community members including Shova Sharma, Meena Baharat and Poppy Chappiyan were also in attendance.

For the organizers of this farewell ceremony, Team Aid was represented by Mohan Nannapaneni, Srinivas Gondi, Shankar Magapu, Anil Potluri, Krishna Majeti and Srinivas Batchu; and FIA-NE was represented by Abhishek Singh, Sanjay Gokhale, Jyoti Singh, Rakesh Kavari and Anand Sharma, Santosh Thawani, Shova Sharma, Mohan Sonti.

All the community leaders expressed their gratitude for Dr. Jeph's dedicated service and wished him the best that life has to offer. Many expressed their desire to see Dr. Jeph return as the Consul General at the Boston Consulate of India. The audience was moved by heartfelt tributes from various community leaders who expressed their deep appreciation for Dr. Jeph's dedication, professionalism, and unwavering commitment to the welfare of the Indian American community.

FIA-NE President Abhishek Singh praised Dr. Jeph's leadership, highlighting his efforts in assisting Indian nationals, including college and university students in New England, who were stranded in the U.S. during the COVID pandemic. He also acknowledged Dr. Jeph's support in establishing a new consulate in Boston to serve the New England region, as well as his role in the Air India direct flight initiative. Additionally, Abhishek praised Dr. Jeph for his support in organizing the historic International India Day Parade at Boston Harbor.

Team Aid President Mohan Nannapaneni, who hosted the event, spoke warmly of Dr. Jeph's dedication and support for ongoing cooperation between Team Aid and the Indian Consulate in New York.

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



Glimpses of the farewell to Dr. Varun Jeph, DCG, Indian Consulate, New York

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# Mahabaleshwar: The Queen of Hill Stations

Nestled in the Western Ghats of Maharashtra, Mahabaleshwar is a picturesque hill station renowned for its scenic beauty, lush greenery, and historic significance. Known as the "Queen of Hill Stations" in Maharashtra, Mahabaleshwar attracts tourists from across the country and beyond with its breathtaking viewpoints, pleasant climate, and cultural heritage. Whether you're an adventure enthusiast, a nature lover, or a history buff, Mahabaleshwar has something to offer for everyone.

Mahabaleshwar has a rich history that dates back to the colonial era when it served as the summer capital of the Bombay Presidency under British rule. However, its significance goes further back to the time of the Maratha Empire. The name "Mahabaleshwar" is derived from the Sanskrit words "Maha" (great) and "Bal" (strength), signifying the strength of Lord Shiva. The Mahabaleshwar Temple, dedicated to Lord Shiva, is an important pilgrimage site that adds spiritual charm to this hill station. The British developed Mahabaleshwar as a retreat from the sweltering heat of the plains, contributing to its structured layout, numerous viewpoints, and colonial-era bungalows that still exist today.

## Best Time to Visit Mahabaleshwar

The best time to visit Mahabaleshwar largely depends on what kind of experience you seek:

- **Summer (March to June):** Ideal for sightseeing, outdoor activities, and escaping the scorching heat of the plains. The temperature ranges between 15°C and 35°C.
- **Monsoon (July to September):** The region transforms into a lush green paradise, with waterfalls gushing in full force. However, heavy rainfall can limit outdoor activities, and landslides may occasionally occur.
- **Winter (October to February):** The cool and crisp weather makes it the best time for exploring the hill station and enjoying nature walks. The temperature can drop as low as 5°C, making it perfect for a cozy retreat.

## How to Reach Mahabaleshwar

Mahabaleshwar is well-connected by road and rail, making it an easily accessible destination from major cities like Mumbai and Pune.

- **By Air:** The nearest airport is Pune International Airport, about 120 km away. From there, you can hire a taxi or take a bus to Mahabaleshwar.
- **By Train:** The closest railway station is Satara, 60 km away, followed by Pune railway station. From Satara, taxis and buses are available for Mahabaleshwar.
- **By Road:** Regular buses and private taxis operate from Mumbai (260 km) and Pune (120 km), making road travel the most convenient option. The drive through the Western Ghats offers picturesque landscapes and lush greenery.

## Top Attractions in Mahabaleshwar

### 1. Wilson Point (Sunrise Point)



Wilson Point is the highest point in Mahabaleshwar and offers a mesmerizing view of the sunrise. It has three platforms that provide a panoramic view of the surroundings, making it an ideal spot for photographers and nature lovers.

### 2. Arthur's Seat

Arthur's Seat is famous for its stunning views of the Savitri River and surrounding valleys. The viewpoint is

also known for its unique rock formations and is often compared to the Grand Canyon due to the deep valleys surrounding it.

### 3. Venna Lake

A major tourist attraction, Venna Lake offers boating and horse riding opportunities. The lake is surrounded by lush greenery, making it a great spot for photography and relaxation. Tourists can

enjoy paddle boats, rowboats, and horse rides along the lake.

### 4. Mahabaleshwar Temple

This ancient temple dedicated to Lord Shiva is a major pilgrimage site. It houses the sacred Shiva Lingam and is an architectural marvel, reflecting Hemadant architectural style. Devotees flock to this temple to seek blessings and experience the divine aura of the place.

### 5. Mapro Garden

A must-visit for food lovers, Mapro Garden is famous for its strawberry farms, fruit-based products, and delicious milkshakes. The annual Strawberry Festival is a major highlight, where visitors can taste a variety of strawberry-based delicacies, including jams, juices, and ice creams.

### 6. Elephant's Head Point

Resembling the shape of an elephant's head, this viewpoint offers a breathtaking view of the Sahyadri mountains and deep valleys. It is one of the most photogenic spots in Mahabaleshwar.

### 7. Lingmala Waterfall

A beautiful waterfall that cascades from a height of 600 feet, Lingmala Waterfall is best visited during the monsoon season. Visitors can hike through a forested trail to reach the falls and enjoy the cool misty air.

### 8. Pratapgad Fort

Located 24 km from Mahabaleshwar, Pratapgad Fort is a historic site linked to Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj. It offers stunning views and insight into Maratha history. Visitors can explore the fort's architecture, temples, and historical significance.

## Activities

### 1. Boating at Venna Lake

Boating in the serene waters of Venna Lake is a relaxing activity that allows tourists to enjoy the tranquility of the surroundings.

### 2. Trekking and Nature Walks

Mahabaleshwar has several trekking trails that take you through dense forests, waterfalls, and viewpoints. Popular trekking routes include Tapola trek and the trails leading to various viewpoints.

### 3. Horse Riding

Horse riding is a popular activity near Venna Lake and other viewpoints, offering tourists a unique way to explore the area.

### 4. Shopping at Town Bazaar

The local markets in Mahabaleshwar offer handicrafts, leather goods, and famous fruit-based products like jams, syrups, and jellies.

# History This Week

MAR 28 - APR 03

## MARCH 28

March 28, 1979 - Near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, the Three Mile Island



nuclear power plant accident occurred in which uranium in the reactor core overheated due to the failure of a cooling valve. A pressure relief valve then stuck causing the water level to plummet, threatening a catastrophic nuclear meltdown. The accident resulted in the release of radioactive steam into the atmosphere, and created a storm of controversy over the necessity and safety of nuclear power plants.

## MARCH 29

March 29, 1979 - In the U.S. Congress, the House Select Committee on Assassinations released its final report regarding the killings of John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, and Robert Kennedy.



Birthdays - John Tyler (1790-1862) the 10th U.S. President was born in Charles City County, Virginia. He became president upon the death of William H. Harrison and served from 1841 to 1845. In 1861, Tyler was elected to the Confederate Congress, but died before being seated.

## MARCH 30

March 30, 1981 - Newly elected President Ronald Reagan was shot in the



chest while walking toward his limousine in Washington, D.C., following a speech inside a hotel. The president was then rushed into surgery to remove a 22-caliber bullet from his left lung. "I should have ducked," Reagan joked. Three others were also hit including Reagan's Press Secretary, James Brady,

who was shot in the forehead but survived. The president soon recovered from the surgery and returned to his duties.

Birthdays - Vincent Van Gogh (1853-1890) was born in Groot Zundert, Holland. He was a Postimpressionist painter, generally considered the greatest Dutch painter after Rembrandt. During his short (10-year) painting career he produced over 800 oil paintings and 700 drawings, but sold only one during his lifetime. In 1987, the sale of his painting *Iris* brought \$53.9 million, the highest price ever paid for a work of art up to that time. During his life, Van Gogh suffered from despair and bouts of mental illness, at one point cutting off part of his own left ear. He committed suicide in 1890 by gunshot.

## MARCH 31

March 31, 1933 - The Civilian Conservation Corps, the CCC, was founded. Unemployed men and youths were organized into quasi-military formations and worked outdoors in national parks and forests.



March 31, 1968 - President Lyndon Johnson made a surprise announcement that he would not seek re-election as a result of the Vietnam conflict.

March 31, 1991 - The Soviet Republic of Georgia, birthplace of Josef Stalin, voted to declare its independence from Soviet Russia, after similar votes by Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia. Following the vote in Georgia, Russian troops were dispatched from Moscow under a state of emergency.

Birthdays - Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809) was born in Rohrau, Austria. Considered the father of the symphony and the string quartet, his works include 107 symphonies, 50 divertimenti, 84 string quartets, 58 piano sonatas, and 13 masses. Based in Vienna, Mozart was his friend and Beethoven was a pupil.

Birthdays - Boxing champion Jack Johnson (1878-1946) was born in Galveston, Texas. He was the first African American to win the heavyweight boxing title.

## APRIL 1

April 1, 1865 - During the American Civil War, Confederate troops of General George Pickett were defeated and cut off at Five Forks, Virginia. This sealed the fate of Confederate General Robert E. Lee's armies at Petersburg and Richmond and hastened the end of the war.

April 1, 1998 - A federal judge in Little Rock, Arkansas, dismissed a sexual harassment case against President Bill

Clinton, stating the case had no "genuine issues" worthy of trial. Although President Clinton had denied any wrongdoing, a unanimous ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court in May 1997 allowed the case to proceed, thereby establishing a precedent allowing sitting presidents to be sued for personal conduct that allegedly occurred before taking office.

## APRIL 2

April 2, 1513 - Spanish explorer Ponce De Leon sighted Florida and claimed it for the Spanish Crown after landing at the site of present day St. Augustine, now the oldest city in the continental U.S.

April 2, 1792 - Congress established the first U.S. Mint at Philadelphia.

April 2, 1863 - A bread riot occurred in the Confederate capital of Richmond, Virginia, as angry people demanded bread from a bakery wagon then wrecked nearby shops. The mob dispersed only after Confederate President Jefferson Davis made a personal plea and threatened to use force.

April 2, 1865 - General Robert E. Lee informed Confederate President Jefferson Davis that he must evacuate the Confederate capital at Richmond, Virginia. Davis and his cabinet then fled by train.

April 2, 1982 - The beginning of the Falkland Islands War as troops from Argentina invaded and occupied the British colony located near the tip of South America. The British retaliated and defeated the Argentineans on June 15, 1982, after ten weeks of combat, with about 1,000 lives lost.



Birthdays - Fairy tale author Hans Christian Andersen (1805-1875) was born in Odense, Denmark. He created 168 fairy tales for children including the classics *The Princess and the Pea*, *The Snow Queen* and *The Nightingale*.

Birthdays - French writer Emile Zola (1840-1902) was born in Paris. His works included a series of 20 books known as the *Rougon-Macquart Novels* in which he defined men and women as products of heredity and environment, portraying them as victims of their own passions and circumstances of birth. In his later years, he became involved in resolving the Dreyfus affair, a political-military scandal in which Captain Alfred Dreyfus had been wrongly accused of selling military secrets to the Germans was sent to Devil's Island.

## APRIL 3

April 3, 1860 - In the American West, the Pony Express service began as the first rider departed St. Joseph, Missouri. For \$5 an ounce, letters were delivered 2,000 miles to California within ten days. The famed Pony Express riders each rode from 75 to 100 miles before handing the letters off to the next rider. A total of 190 way stations were located about 15 miles apart. The service lasted less than

two years, ending upon the completion of the overland telegraph.

April 3, 1865 - The Confederate capital of Richmond surrendered to Union forces after the withdrawal of General Robert E. Lee's troops.

April 3, 1944 - The U.S. Supreme Court ruled 8 to 1 that African Americans can not be barred from voting in the Texas Democratic primaries. The Court stated that discrimination against blacks violates the 15th Amendment and that political parties are not private associations.



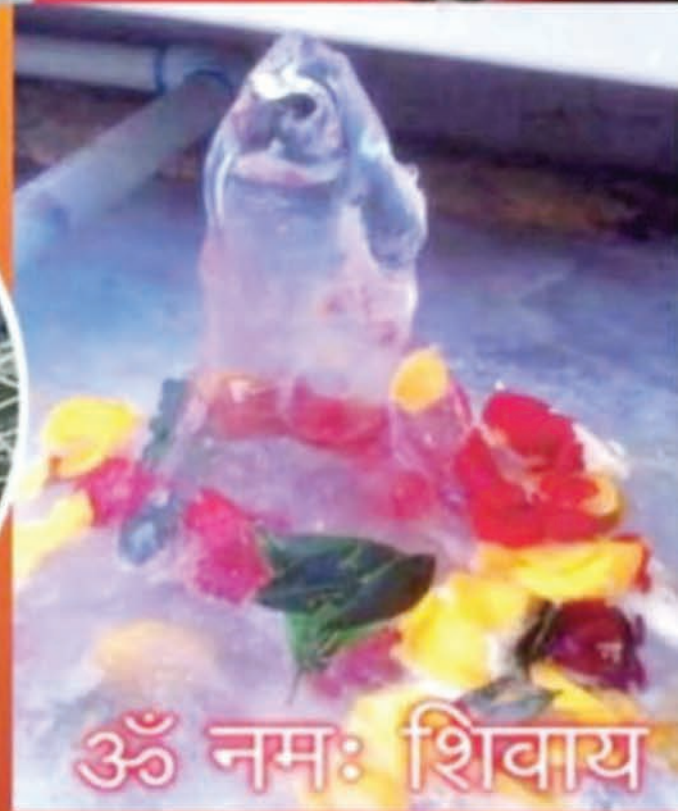
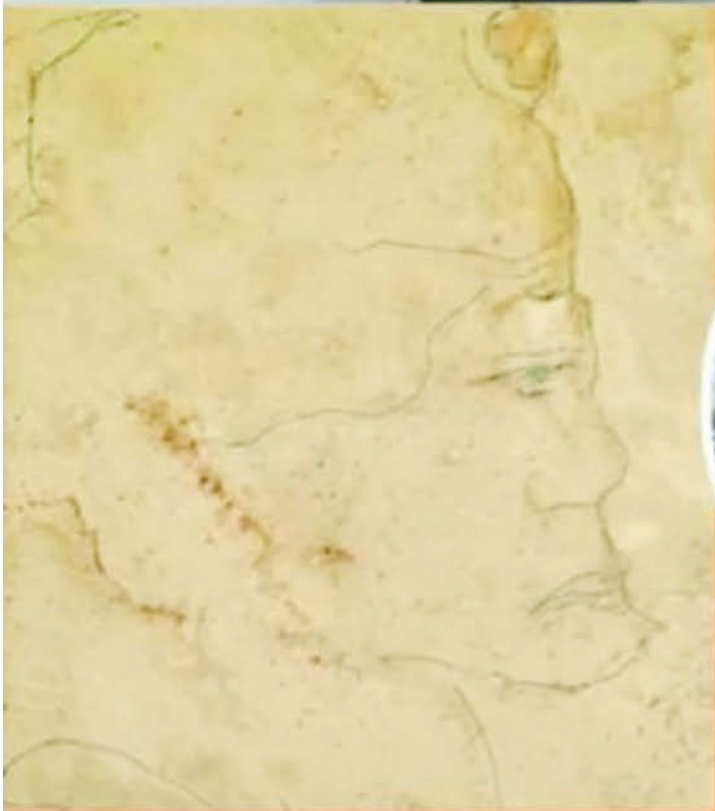
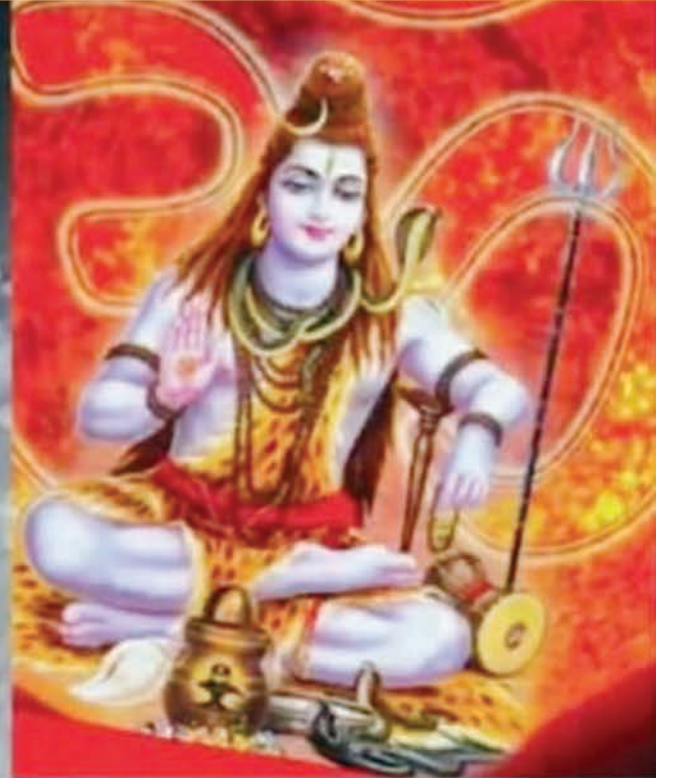
April 3, 1948 - President Harry S. Truman signed the European Recovery Program, better known as the Marshall Plan, intended to stop the spread of Communism and restore the economies of European countries devastated by World War II. Over four years, the program distributed \$12 billion to the nations of Western Europe. The program was first proposed by Secretary of State George C. Marshall during a historic speech at Harvard University on June 5, 1947.

April 3, 1995 - Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor became the first woman to preside over the Court, sitting in for Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist who was out of town.



Birthdays - American writer Washington Irving (1783-1859) was born in New York City. His works include; *Rip Van Winkle*, *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* and historical biographies such as *The Life of Washington*.

Birthdays - Tammany Hall 'Boss' William M. Tweed (1823-1878) was born in New York City. From 1851 to 1871, his 'Tweed Ring' of political corruption looted millions from New York City, bringing the city to the verge of bankruptcy. Methods included padding city bills by 85 percent and writing checks to non-existent persons and companies. His power was broken after a series of critical editorial cartoons by Thomas Nast were published in Harper's Weekly magazine. Tweed was arrested and convicted on charges of larceny and forgery. He died in prison.



**Abhishek Mishra & Family**

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# Recalling the 1975 World Cup Hockey Triumph: A feat India is yet to emulate



BY  
PRABHJOT SINGH

Notwithstanding back-to-back bronze medals in the Olympic Games, India has yet to emulate its title triumph in the elite World Cup Hockey Tournament it last won 50 years ago. In between, India managed to add its eighth Olympic gold in Moscow in 1980; it, however, continues its endeavor to add its fourth World Cup Hockey medal to its kitty.

Starting its World Cup campaign with a bronze in 1971 in Barcelona, India improved its standing to a silver in Amstelveen in 1973 and peaked to glory in Kuala Lumpur in 1975.

Since then, it has competed in all editions of the elite FIH event without a podium finish.

The story of the 1975 triumph stands out for more than one reason.

All was not well with India's administration and performance after its silver medal finishes in the 1973 Amstelveen World Cup and the 1974 Asian Games in Teheran. However, in the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich, India retained the bronze medal it last won in the 1968 Mexico Games.

Not only the supremacy of Indian hockey was challenged; dissensions had started appearing in the administrative side of the game. Ashwani Kumar, who had been at the helm of affairs, started feeling the heat of his sworn opponents' hue and cry.

Unable to dislodge him, they took political recourse. An incident that Ashwani Kumar shared with an elite gathering of the followers of our "unofficially" acknowledged game to choose the best-ever Sikh hockey Olympian was revealing.

Ashwani Kumar recalled what he described as the "most agonizing moment" of his decades-long association with the sport. He was summoned to the union capital by the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi to be confronted with an "unsavory query" as to "why Indian hockey teams were studded mostly by Sikh players?". He said he was stunned at the question. Dejected and depressed after the meeting, Ashwani Kumar returned and submitted his resignation from the top position of the Indian Hockey Federation to the then President of the Indian Olympic Association, Raja Bhalendra Singh.

It happened in the second half of 1974, just in time for the country to start preparing its team for the 1975 World Cup. Confusion prevailed. It led to uncertainty as there was more than one claimant for the top post of the Indian Hockey Federation (IHF) as it was known at that time. Even a whiff of a parallel IHF staking claim to be the genuine body cropped up.

Realizing the gravity of the crisis, the then Punjab Chief Minister, Giani Zail Singh, offered to train the Indian team for the Kuala Lumpur World Cup. The offer was gleefully accepted by the IOA, the parent body of Indian sports. The Punjab government managed to rope in both the Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research (PGIMER) and Panjab University while deciding to hold the training at the Panjab University campus. A newly constructed hostel, which was meant for female students, was made the camping venue for the camp. That camp was held under the watchful eyes of Balbir Singh Senior and Gurcharan Singh Bodhi, in which physical fitness trainer Dr SS Gill from Panjab University and a team of doctors led by Dr Rajinder Kalra of PGI were associated. The camp management always used the services of psychologists, dieticians and others.



A picture of an event where Balbir Singh Senior, Ajit Pal Singh, and Ashok Kumar - all associated with the 1975 World Cup champion team - were present and Prabhjot Singh anchored that event.

Photo provided by the author

While all these efforts were going on to build and train a strong team, the developments in the Indian Hockey Federation were far from conducive. As the dates of the tournament were approaching, Indian players served an ultimatum that they would go to Kuala Lumpur under the IOA banner.

And the rest is history. India won the coveted World Cup on the lush green playfields of Merdeka Stadium, which is no longer used for hockey or football. Hockey and football have their new ultra-modern complexes at nearby Bukit Jalili. I had a chance to visit the ground where India scripted history on March 15, 1975, by defeating its archrival and neighbor, Pakistan, in the final.

Since I was a student of the first batch of journalism at Punjabi University, Patiala, I chose hockey for my dissertation. It was a great delight to me when India returned home with its first-ever and only gold from a World Cup. I considered myself lucky, as I used to frequent the camp at Chandigarh at regular intervals to interact with the probables.

A lot of water has flowed down the Sutlej since then, as Panjab University now has a synthetic hockey turf on the ground where World Cup players used to train. And the hostel where they stayed for several months is now rightly serving as a women's hostel as it was planned.

A couple of years ago, Playwrite, an organization that provides a platform for those associated with sports in various capacities as players, organizers, administrators, doctors and journalists, held its session where Balbir Singh Senior (manager), Ajit Pal Singh (captain) and mercurial Ashok Kumar (forward and gold medal-winning goal scorer) and Dr N. Mohan (Professor of Panjab University) participated to recall those golden moments of 1975.

## Looking Back - When I visited Merdeka Stadium

It was in 2019 that I got an opportunity to visit the Merdeka Stadium, the historic venue where the 1975 World Cup final between India and Pakistan was played. On March 15, 1975, India scripted history. After winning a bronze in the first World Cup in Barcelona, India finished runners-up in the second World Cup in the Netherlands, losing to the hosts in a tiebreaker after having taken a 2-0 lead early in the game. The wait for glory and the crown ended only in Kuala Lumpur on this day, 48 years ago.

I had an opportunity to revisit Merdeka Stadium in September 2019. The grassy field on which two great traditional rivals and neighbors slugged out for the gold is no more a hockey venue. Instead, Kuala Lumpur has a new ultramodern hockey complex where all major

international hockey events are organized.

The Stadium Merdeka has a long history. It is known as the site of the formal declaration of independence of the Federation of Malaysia was declared on August 31, 1957, almost 10 years after India got its freedom. Subsequently, it was chosen as a venue for the promulgation of Malaysia on September 16, 1963. At one stage it was the largest stadium in Southeast Asia before it underwent structural changes.

The stadium has a lower and an upper terrace, with a total capacity of 25,000, as well as 14 tunnel entrances, a covered stand, 50 turnstiles and four floodlight towers. It remained the main venue for holding all major sporting events in Kuala Lumpur till Bukit Jalal National Stadium was built in time for the 1998 Commonwealth Games.

Besides the World Cup Hockey final in March 1975, it was also the venue for an Olympic Qualifier football event when Malaysia last qualified for the 1980 Moscow Olympic Games. It also used to be the venue for the Merdeka Cup Football Tournament.

Some members of the 1975 World Cup champion Indian hockey team, including Ashok Dhyhan Chand, Aslam Sher Khan and Brig Harcharan Singh, have very fond memories of the event.

Since then, India has played host to this prestigious FIH tournament four times - 1981-82 in Bombay (now Mumbai), 2010 in New Delhi, 2018 and 2023 in Odisha. Unfortunately, India, as hosts could not even reach the semi-finals of the World Cup. In the last edition held jointly in Rourkela and Bhubaneswar, India touched a new low by failing to qualify even for the quarter-finals.

Hockey has also come a long way since the maiden 1975 gold medal triumph. From grass, it has moved to synthetic surfaces. It was a year after the Third World up in Malaysia, and the 1976 Summer Olympic Games saw the introduction of synthetic surfaces for hockey competitions. It also marked the beginning of the downfall of Indian hockey. Though India won the gold medal in the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow, it was primarily because of a boycott by US-led Western world. The truncated hockey competition saw India winning narrowly against Spain in a closely contested gold medal match.

Between 1980 and 2021, India did not get any Olympic medals in hockey. It got a reprieve in the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games held in 2021 when it returned to the podium to win a bronze. But the subsequent World Cup in Odisha in January this year came as a big disappointment and India finished a poor joint ninth with Argentina.

Ashok Dhyhan Chand, who was in Chandigarh to participate in the Playwrite Sports seminar says that each member of the 1975 World Cup champion team enjoys the right to claim his role in bringing singular honor to Indian hockey in the 52-year history of the World.

Personally speaking, 1973 was our best chance, and I still hold we missed a great opportunity to bring the trophy home after taking a 2-0 lead in the final against the hosts, the Netherlands.

"Though we had been Olympic champions before but were never a World Cup winner," says Ashok Kumar who scored the match-winning goal against Pakistan in the final. Pakistan had taken the lead which fullback Surjit Singh neutralized with a penalty corner conversion. It was left to mercurial Ashok Kumar to score the decisive goal. Earlier, it was Harcharan Singh whose goal in the semi-final got India into the final.

"We all members of the 1975 World Cup champion have only one desire - to see India back on the podium with the gold medal," says Ashok Dhyhan Chand revealing that an exclusive Hockey Museum in memory of his father and Hockey Wizard is under construction at Jhansi. The museum when completed would cost Rs 19 lakh.

*(Prabhjot Singh is a Toronto-based Senior Journalist. He can be reached at Prabhjot416@gmail.com)*

# IPL 2025: Pooran's blitz powers LSG win

HYDERABAD (TIP)

Shardul Thakur's four-wicket haul and a sensational display of power-hitting from Nicholas Pooran set up a five-wicket win for Lucknow Super Giants over Sunrisers Hyderabad in an IPL match here on Thursday, March 27.

Shardul continued his dream comeback returning with figures of 4/34 to help LSG restrict a power-packed SRH to 190 for nine before Pooran (70 off 26; 6x4s, 6x6s) displayed his 360 degree hitting skills.

Pooran shared quick-fire match-winning 116 runs for the second wicket with Marsh (52 off 31) to help LSG chase down the target in 16.1 overs.

LSG didn't have the best start to their chase as they lost Aiden Markram early. But thereafter, it was the effortless hitting from Mitchell Marsh and Nicholas Pooran that helped LSG surge ahead.

Pooran in particular was at his attacking best as he mostly dealt in sixes, clobbering Simarjeet and Abhishek Sharma for huge sixes during his knock, mostly towards the square boundary.

SRH just found it difficult to stop Pooran as he didn't even spare Cummins, hitting him for two fours in his first over to reach 77 for 1 in the powerplay.

Pooran brought up the fastest fifty of this season in just 18 balls with another huge six over square leg of Adam Zampa.

Pooran's magnificent knock was cut short by Cummins, trapped in front of the wickets in the ninth over.

After Pooran's dismissal, Marsh took the onus on him and brought up his half-century of just 29 balls.

LSG skipper Rishabh Pant (15 off 15) could not do much but Abdul Samad played an entertaining cameo to get his side home.



Lucknow Super Giants Nicholas Pooran celebrates his half century during a match against Sunrisers Hyderabad. PTI

Earlier opting bowl, Shardul (4/34) gave LSG a fiery start, removing Abishek Sharma and last match centurion Ishan Kishan in consecutive balls in the third over.

Shardul sent packing Sharma with a short delivery before getting Ishan Kishan caught behind off an innocuous delivery down the leg side.

Travis Head (47 off 28), however, looked in ominous form as he took the attack to the opposition and used his brute power to deal in boundaries and sixes.

Head was particularly brutal against Avesh Khan, who sprayed the ball on both sides, with the Australian hitting him for two sixes and one four to pick up 18 runs in the fourth over.

Head, however, was lucky as he got two reprieves.

Head skied Ravi Bishnoi's first ball down the ground, and Pooran stationed

at long-on had all the time in the world to get under the ball and take a simple catch but the West Indian put it down.

The missed chance proved costly as Head slammed Bishnoi over covers for a maximum.

Bishnoi had another chance to claim the wicket of Head in the fifth ball of the sixth over but he failed to latch on to a difficult return catch. But Head's luck finally ran out when fast bowler Prince Yadav disturbed his timbers to pick up his first IPL wicket.

Henrich Klaasen (26 off 17) was looking dangerous but got out in a bizarre fashion, run out by Yadav off his own bowling as a straight drive from Nitish Reddy ricocheted on to the stumps from the bowlers follow through.

SRH skipper Pat Cummins (18 off 4) hit three sixes of his first three balls before departing. *Source: PTI*



## Argentina secures World Cup spot

Defending champion Argentina celebrated throughout Tuesday as the team secured its place at the 2026 World Cup hours before an historic 4-1 win over archrival Brazil.

Bolivia's failure to beat Uruguay meant Argentina had enough cushion in South American qualifying to secure one of the continent's six direct spots for the 48-team World Cup set to be co-hosted next year by the U.S., Canada and Mexico.

After Bolivia's 0-0 draw with Uruguay at El Alto, about 85,000 raucous Argentina fans kicked off the festivities at the Monumental de Nunez Stadium despite the absence of Lionel Messi. They were chanting into the night in Buenos Aires, now more confident their team can defend the World Cup title.

For Brazil, its worst deficit in South American World Cup qualifying history compounded pressure on coach Dorival Júnior.

Brazil is in fourth place in South American qualifying with 21 points, 10 behind Argentina but only two behind second-place Ecuador, which was held to a 0-0 draw by Chile. Third-place Uruguay and fifth-place Paraguay also have 21 points, and Colombia is one point behind them in sixth. Seventh-place Venezuela has 15 points after a 1-0 win over 9th-place Peru.

Brazil was missing three regular starters — goalkeeper Alisson, defender Gabriel Magalhães and midfielder Bruno Guimarães — and wasn't really competitive from start to finish.

It's the first time Argentina has won both matches against Brazil in a World Cup qualifying tournament. The home victory was also Argentina's first against the Brazilians since qualifying for the 2006 World Cup.

Argentina has led South American qualifying from the start, with few hiccups and major away wins at Brazil and Uruguay. But coach Lionel Scaloni has not fielded 37-year-old Messi in several games, which still raises doubts on whether the star will play at the World Cup next year.

Messi has an injury to his adductor and was not included in Argentina's squad for the two latest matches.

Striker Julián Álvarez said Argentina's big win "is historic because of the rival, the context, what was said, the great match we played and because we are qualified to the World Cup."

# Wanted to make it count: Quinton de Kock after his match-winning knock against Rajasthan Royals

GUWAHATI (TIP)

After giving a match-winning performance against Rajasthan Royals in the Indian Premier League (IPL) 2025, Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) opener Quinton De Kock expressed his feelings on scoring an unbeaten fifty in the sixth match of the competition.

De Kock won the Player of the Match award after playing unbeaten innings of 97 runs from 61 balls at a staggering strike rate of 159.02, which was laced by eight boundaries and six maximums in his innings.

Speaking after the match, the wicketkeeper-batter said that he felt really good as he got an opportunity to play and make it count for the defending champions.

"Nice to get my opportunity, and I wanted to make it count. To be fair, haven't felt any challenges yet. Have had 3 months off which felt nice. Had about a



10-day build-up to this season. Only my second game here, just taking it as I see it. Luckily, we batted second so I could watch the wicket, see how the ball was behaving. Just played the situation of the game. The IPL is known for big sixes

and big scores, but that wasn't the moment for me. It was just about winning it, as far as I know it," De Kock said in the post-match presentation.

Further, the 32-year-old player spoke about the pitch conditions of the Barsapara Cricket Stadium in Guwahati during the second innings of the encounter.

"I love meeting new people and being in new environments. It is about finding your feet within the team. Sometimes, the team accepts you later, but here, with KKR, they have accepted me already with open arms, so it feels good. Not the type of wicket for that kind of game; the ball was turning and stopping. It was a working man's wicket. If we get an opportunity at a better wicket, then surely that will be a chat, but today it was all about getting down and winning it," the former South African cricketer added. *Source: ANI*



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