



The INDIAN PANORAMA

We are pleased to announce a special edition to mark the **77th Republic Day of India**. Articles and advertisements may please be submitted at salujaindra@gmail.com by January 18th. For any questions, please email at info@theindianpanorama.news or call 646-247-9458

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Trump, top Iranian officials exchange threats over protests roiling Iran

Trump warns Iran against killing peaceful protesters as demonstrations enter sixth day, escalating tensions after US strikes on Iranian nuclear sites



US President Donald Trump -File photo

JANUARY 2, 2026
WASHINGTON, D.C. (TIP)

US President Donald Trump and top Iranian officials exchanged dueling threats on Friday, January 2, as widening

protests swept across parts of the Islamic Republic, further escalating tensions between the countries after America bombed Iranian nuclear sites in June, reports AP.

At least eight people have been killed so far in violence surrounding the demonstrations, which were sparked in part by the collapse of Iran's rial currency but have increasingly seen crowds chanting anti-government slogans.

The protests, now in their sixth day, have become the biggest in Iran since 2022, when the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini in police custody triggered nationwide demonstrations.

However, the protests have yet to be as widespread and intense as those surrounding the death of Amini, who was detained over not wearing her hijab, or headscarf, to the liking of authorities.

Trump post sparks quick Iranian response

Trump initially wrote on his Truth Social platform, warning Iran that if it "violently kills peaceful protesters," the United States "will come to their rescue."

"We are locked and loaded and ready to go," Trump wrote, without elaborating.

Ali Larijani, a former parliament speaker who serves as the secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, alleged that Israel and the US were stoking the demonstrations.

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Mamdani vows to "govern as a democratic socialist"



New York Attorney General Letitia James, left, administers the oath of office to mayor-elect Zohran Mamdani (center), as his wife Rama Duwaji looks on, in New York, January 1, 2026

Photo : AP / PTI

Revokes executive orders issued after former mayor Eric Adams had been indicted on corruption charges

READ FULL STORY ON PAGE 7

UN chief calls on Israel to reverse NGOs ban in Gaza

Israel says the new regulation aims to prevent bodies it accuses of supporting terrorism from operating in the Palestinian territories

JANUARY 2, 2026
UNITED NATIONS (TIP)

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres called on Friday, January 2, 2026, for Israel to end a ban on humanitarian agencies that provided aid in Gaza, saying he was "deeply concerned" at the development, a Reuters report says.

Mr. Guterres "calls for this measure to be reversed, stressing that international non-governmental organizations are

CONTD ON PAGE 42



UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres -Photo Credit: Reuters

Marriage to a US citizen no longer guarantees Green Card

While spouses of American citizens are eligible to apply as immediate relatives, officials now focus on whether the marriage is genuine and entered into in good faith

JANUARY 2, 2026
NEW YORK (TIP)

Marriage to a US citizen no longer guarantees a Green Card, as US immigration authorities are applying stricter scrutiny to marriage-based applications.

While spouses of American citizens are eligible to apply as immediate relatives, officials now focus on whether the marriage is genuine and entered into in good faith.

Immigration experts stress that cohabitation is a key factor, and couples who do not live together face a higher risk of investigation or denial, regardless of the reason for living apart. These measures are part of broader efforts to tighten US immigration policies and prevent marriage fraud.

CONTD ON PAGE 42



President Trump has ordered the Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem to pause the DV 1 program.

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Prof. Indrajit S. Saluja

VICE PRESIDENT:

Chitagam Saluja

CHIEF EDITOR:

Prof Indrajit S. Saluja

ASSISTANT EDITOR:

Bidisha Roy

SPL. REPORTER UNO:

H.S. Panaser

GRAPHICS DIRECTOR:

Om Parkash Malik

DIRECTOR**ADMINISTRATION:**

Gauri Beri

CONTRIBUTING**PHOTOGRAPHERS:**

Baldev Singh / BJ Videos

Gunjesh Desai / Masala Junction

Jay Mandal,

Mohammad Jaffer,

SnapsIndia

Mohammad Shahzad,

Zia Khan,

Nisha Rani

Vaaho Photographers,

Vijay Shah - Photo Journalist.

CORRESPONDENTS :**SACRAMENTO:**

Parminder S. Aujla

NEW YORK :

Chitagam

FRESNO:

Tarlochan Singh

DALLAS:

Harjit Dhesi, Amarjit Dhillon

OVERSEAS CORRESPONDENTS**LONDON**

Nirpal Singh Shergill

SPL CORRESPONDENT**DELHI BUREAU CHIEF:**

Chandan Singh

CHANDIGARH:

Manjit Sidhu

LUDHIANA:

A.S. Arora,

R.P.Sharma

JAIPUR :

Dr. Yashpaul Goyal

DALLAS BUREAU CHIEF & VP

Lovliien Kaurr

972-330-3139

editor@theindianpanorama.news

The Indian Panorama

P.O. Box No. 190067, South

Richmond Hill, NY 11419,

Tel: 646-247-9458

Email:

editor@theindianpanorama.news

COMMENT

A Familiar Drumbeat of War: On President Trump's post-the US is "locked and loaded"

INDRAJIT
SALUJA

At the very dawn of a new year—when churches, synagogues, mosques, and homes across the world were praying for peace, restraint, and renewal—an ominous note intruded into the global conscience. In a post on Truth Social dated January 1, President Donald Trump reacted to the killing of protesters in Iran by declaring that the United States was "locked and loaded" and ready to enter Iran to protect the protesters against the Iranian regime.

Those words—casual, combative, and chilling—reawakened an old American fear: that the United States, yet again, may be sleepwalking toward another unnecessary, costly, and morally troubling foreign war.

For those of us old enough to remember, the language has an unsettling familiarity. It echoes the rhetoric that once drew America into the long, painful quagmire of Vietnam—a war we regret not because we stayed out of it, but because we ever went in at all. Vietnam was supposed to be about containing communism and protecting freedom. What it became was a tragedy measured in body bags, shattered lives, and a lasting scar on America's moral standing and national psyche. Have we learned nothing since?

THE DANGEROUS ALLURE OF REGIME CHANGE

Let us speak plainly. The idea that America can—and should—reshape the internal political destiny of other nations through military force is not new. It has been tried repeatedly, often with soaring rhetoric and noble-sounding intentions. And it has failed us time and again.

Did regime change help Afghanistan? After two decades of war, trillions of dollars spent, and countless lives lost, the Taliban returned to power almost exactly as they were before America entered the conflict. Young American soldiers died far from home, believing they were building a stable future—only for that future to collapse in a matter of weeks.

Did it help Iraq? The removal of Saddam Hussein unleashed sectarian violence, destabilized the region, fueled extremism, and directly contributed to the rise of ISIS. Iraq remains fractured, and the Middle East more volatile than before.

Did it help Libya? The overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi plunged that nation into chaos, civil war, and lawlessness. Libya today is not a beacon of democracy; it is a cautionary tale of what happens when bombs replace diplomacy.

Did it help Syria? Years of conflict, millions of refugees, and widespread human suffering have yielded no clear moral or strategic victory.

And now, we are to believe that Iran will somehow be the exception—that this time, intervention will be clean, limited, and successful? History argues otherwise. Experience shouts a warning.

NOT EVERY TRAGEDY IS AMERICA'S WAR

No decent human being can remain unmoved by images of protesters being killed for demanding dignity and freedom. The suffering of ordinary Iranians is real, and it demands international attention. But compassion does not automatically translate into bombs and troops.

There is a profound difference between standing for human rights and assuming the role of global enforcer. When America rushes in militarily, the moral clarity often blurs. Protest movements are discredited as foreign-backed. Nationalist sentiments harden. Civilians—those we claim to protect—end up paying the highest price.



President Donald Trump

-Official White House Portrait 2025

Every war begins with claims of urgency and righteousness. Rarely do leaders dwell on the aftermath: the coffins draped in flags, the veterans struggling with trauma, the taxpayer-funded military hardware reduced to smoldering wreckage. Wars are easy to start and painfully hard to end.

THE PRICE PAID BY ORDINARY AMERICANS

What do we gain from these interventions? Not peace. Not stability. Not gratitude. What we gain are grieving families, broken veterans, ballooning deficits, and a military stretched thin across the globe.

America's sons and daughters do not enlist to fight vague, open-ended wars with shifting objectives. They enlist to defend the nation when it is truly threatened. Iran's internal repression, tragic as it may be, does not constitute an immediate threat to American soil that justifies armed intervention.

We are the world's number one nation economically, militarily, technologically, and culturally. Our influence is unmatched. Yet we so often choose the blunt instrument of force instead of the patient tools of diplomacy, sanctions, international pressure, and moral leadership.

Strength is not measured by how quickly a nation reaches for the trigger. True strength lies in restraint.

A MORAL ARGUMENT FOR PEACE

There is also a deeper moral dimension that must not be ignored—especially by a nation that so often invokes faith in its public life. The Bible speaks unambiguously about the sanctity of life—from the womb onwards—and about peace as a divine ideal. The same scriptures that many cite to argue against abortion also warn against bloodshed, pride, and vengeance.

The central figure of Christianity, Jesus Christ, did not choose the sword even when confronted with injustice. He spoke of turning the other cheek, of loving one's neighbor, and of peacemaking so radical that he willingly submitted to crucifixion rather than endorse violence.

If these teachings mean anything beyond rhetoric, they must inform our foreign policy as much as our domestic debates.

Peace is not passive. It requires effort, creativity, and courage. It means engaging allies, empowering international institutions, applying sustained diplomatic pressure, and offering asylum and support to victims of repression—without turning their homelands into war zones.

A NEW YEAR'S PLEA

At the start of this new year, humanity does not need another war. It needs healing. It needs leaders who pause before posting, who weigh words knowing that markets, armies, and lives respond to presidential statements.

America should lead—but lead toward peace. Toward dialogue. Toward de-escalation. Let our aircraft carriers be symbols of deterrence, not invitations to conflict. Let our influence be used to cool tempers, not inflame them.

We have tried the game of regime change too many times to plead ignorance. We know how it usually ends. Another generation should not have to learn the same cruel lesson at the cost of blood and tears.

The choice before us is stark. We can build a world ordered by love, cooperation, and respect—or one driven by hatred, suspicion, and endless conflict. For the sake of our soldiers, our conscience, and our shared humanity, let us choose peace.

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2026 Arrives in Majesty

The world welcomed New Year 2026 with vibrant celebrations that swept across time zones, beginning in the Pacific and ending in the Americas. The first greetings came from New Zealand, where fireworks lit up Auckland's skyline, followed by Australia, with Sydney's iconic harbour fireworks drawing global attention. Cities across Asia blended modern spectacle with tradition—temple bells rang in Japan, while dazzling light shows and countdown events marked midnight in Singapore, Seoul and Shanghai.

Across Europe, major landmarks came alive as crowds gathered in Paris, London, Rome and Berlin to usher in the new year, often under heightened security. In India, metropolitan cities like Delhi and Mumbai celebrated with music, fireworks and late-night gatherings. The festivities continued across the Americas, with massive crowds at Rio de Janeiro's Copacabana Beach and the famous Times Square ball drop in New York. Worldwide, New Year 2026 was greeted with joy, reflection and renewed hope for the year ahead.

Fireworks light up the midnight sky over Sydney Harbour Bridge and the Sydney Opera House in Australia. AFP/Getty Images



People pose for pictures near illuminated New Year's decorations in Mumbai, India. AP



People celebrate as the new year begins in Seoul, South Korea. Reuters

People take a selfie with sparklers while celebrating in Moscow. AP



People watch fireworks in Makati, a city just outside of Manila, Philippines. AFP/Getty Images



Fireworks explode around Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest building, in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Fatima Shbair/AP



Drummers ring in the new year at the Juyongguan Great Wall on the outskirts of Beijing. AP



People attend celebrations in Jakarta, Indonesia. Reuters



Fireworks explode during the celebrations in Barcelona, Spain. Reuters



Fireworks light up the sky over Elizabeth Tower and the London Eye in central London. AP



Dallas Stars fans in New Year's dress during an NHL hockey game against the Buffalo Sabres. AP



People celebrate the New Year in Caracas, Venezuela, Thursday, January 1, 2026. AP



People hold numbers showing 2026 in Sanya, Hainan Province of China. VCG/AP



Revelers celebrate the start of 2026 after the ball drop in Times Square. AP

Two Indian-origin Singapore residents to be nominated MPs in Singapore parliament

**JANUARY 2, 2026
SINGAPORE (TIP)**

Two Indian-origin personalities in Singapore, notable for their contributions in work, community and society, are set to be nominated as Members of Parliament next week, a media report said Friday.

The duo is part of the nine names announced to be Nominated Members of Parliament (NMPs) by President Tharman Shanmugaratnam on January 8 and take their oaths at the next sitting of Parliament this month, local media said.

Dr Haresh Singaraju, family physician at National University Polyclinics, and Sanjeev Kumar Tiwari, general secretary of the Amalgamated Union of Public Employees, have been named as the proposed NMPs.

The names were released by the Office of the Clerk of Parliament on Friday, the

channel said.

Among the nine, CEO of apparel company Sing Lun Holdings Mark Lee Kean Phi is to return for a second term.

"They (new NMPs) have made notable contributions in work, community and society, and excelled in their respective fields. "I am confident that their diverse expertise and experience will enrich the discussions in Parliament as we chart Singapore's path forward in an uncertain and disrupted world," said Leader of the House Indranee Rajah, an Indian-origin political veteran of the ruling People's Action Party, in welcoming the new cohort to the 15th Parliament.

Earlier, a Special Select Committee had invited the general public and functional groups to submit names for its consideration.

The NMP scheme aims to ensure a wide representation of views in Parliament, and nominees should have

performed distinguished public service, brought honor to Singapore or distinguished themselves in their respective fields. There can be up to nine NMPs each term, which lasts two-and-a-half-years.

Among other requirements, he or she should also be able to take an active part in Parliament proceedings, according to media reports.

The others six in the list of nominated persons are Azhar Othman, Executive Chairman of Enercon Asia; Associate Professor Goh Toh Chuan Kenneth, President of Singapore Aquatics; Associate Professor Terence Ho Wai Luen, academic/university administrator at the National University of Singapore; Kuah Boon Theng SC, managing director of Legal Clinic LLC; Dr Neo Kok Beng, Founder and CEO of NEO Aeronautics Pte Ltd, and Professor Kenneth Poon Kin Loong, professor at the



Dr Haresh Singaraju, family physician at National University Polyclinics, and Sanjeev Kumar Tiwari, general secretary of the Amalgamated Union of Public Employees, have been named as the proposed NMPs.

National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University.

The last parliament had three Indian-origin NPMs.

Indian American Cornell Tech's Student Suby Valluri wins first Michael Mills Memorial LegalTech Scholarship



Suby Valluri has won the first Michael Mills Memorial LegalTech Scholarship.

**JANUARY 2, 2026
ITHACA, NY (TIP)**

Suby Valluri, an Indian American student who will graduate from Cornell Tech's Master of Laws (LLM) in Law, Technology, and Entrepreneurship program this year, has won the first Michael Mills Memorial LegalTech Scholarship.

Created by a network of more than 50 donors to celebrate the legacy of Mills, an influential figure in legal technology, the scholarship will support students pursuing careers at the intersection of law and technology through the Cornell Tech LLM program, according to a media release.

Valluri, who holds a PhD in quantitative economics and an MA in law, is the co-founder and CEO of FinMont, a travel payments startup. His work combines law, artificial intelligence, and blockchain technology.

"Receiving the Michael Mills Memorial LegalTech Scholarship marks a profoundly meaningful step in my professional journey," Valluri said. "Beyond its financial value, the award reflects Michael Mills's legacy of mentorship, creativity, and his lifelong effort to reshape how law and technology intersect."

Valluri plans to use the scholarship to develop "smart agreements" - contracts that combine traditional legal language with computer code. These agreements can automatically check compliance and

trigger payments across different countries, reducing complexity and making global transactions faster and more reliable.

"My broader aim is to make cross-border transactions more transparent, affordable, and secure," he said. "This scholarship gives me the space and confidence to deepen my research, test new prototypes, and participate more actively in Cornell Tech's LegalTech community. Most importantly, it connects me with a network of thinkers and builders who share a common purpose: making legal systems more transparent, equitable, and adaptable through technology."

The scholarship honors Michael Mills, who co-founded and led Neota, a company that enabled lawyers to build legal software applications without writing code. He also co-founded Central Park Conservancy and Pro Bono Net, a nonprofit that uses technology to expand pro bono legal services. Mills also funded innovation awards in the College of Law Practice Management and mentored professionals moving into technology roles.

Matthew D'Amore, professor of the practice and director of the Law, Technology, and Entrepreneurship Program at Cornell Tech and Cornell Law School, said the scholarship reflects the campus's commitment to shaping the future of legal innovation. By supporting students working at the intersection of law and technology, the scholarship aims to advance innovations that make legal systems more efficient, accessible, and equitable.

With continued donor support, Cornell Tech plans to grow this fund into a permanent resource for aspiring legal tech leaders - ensuring Michael Mills's commitment to progress lives on for generations.

(Read full story at
www.theindianpanorama.news)

Indian American Sanjay Desai announced as Johns Hopkins Medicine vice dean for education

**DECEMBER 30, 2025
BALTIMORE (TIP)**

Dr. Sanjay Desai, chief academic officer of the American Medical Association (AMA), has been named the vice dean for education at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine.

In this role, the Indian American physician leader will oversee all education and training programs across the school of medicine, including MD, PhD, residency, postdoctoral and online, and will partner with institutional leaders to drive innovation, advance educational excellence and enhance the learner experience.

An accomplished physician leader, educator, clinician and researcher, Desai has helped shape medical education nationally, according to a media release from the Baltimore, Maryland-based institution.

At the AMA, he oversees a broad innovation portfolio with a focus on precision education using AI, in collaboration with a consortium of medical schools and health systems. He also leads accreditation-related activities with sponsorship of the Liaison Committee on Medical Education, national policy development across the educational continuum, and the credit system for continuing medical education.

Desai previously served as the Johns Hopkins Myron L. Weisfeldt Professor of Medicine, director of the Osler Medical Residency and vice chair for education in the Department of Medicine - roles he held at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine prior to joining the AMA in October 2021.



Dr. Sanjay Desai has been named the vice dean for education at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine

"We are delighted to welcome Dr. Desai back to Johns Hopkins in this critical role," said Theodore L. DeWeese, dean of the medical faculty and CEO of Johns Hopkins Medicine. "Dr. Desai is a visionary educator and leader whose record of innovation, collaboration and excellence will strengthen our educational mission and prepare the next generation of physicians and scientists to lead in medicine's evolving landscape."

Widely recognized for his accomplishments across academic medicine, policy, clinical practice and health systems administration, his research focuses on generating high-quality data to inform policy and practice in medical education.

Desai has authored over 60 peer-reviewed publications, including articles in the New England Journal of Medicine and JAMA. Among his honors, he received the Professors' Award for Excellence in Teaching from the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine.

Desai graduated summa cum laude from the University of Pennsylvania with a Bachelor of Science degree in bioengineering and a Bachelor of Science degree in economics with a concentration in health care management from the Wharton School of Business.

He earned his medical degree from Harvard Medical School and completed his residency and subspecialty fellowship at The Johns Hopkins Hospital, where he also served as chief resident.

INDIAN-ORIGIN ADVISER
RANJOT "RICKY" SINGH
GILL REWARDED OVER
TRUMP'S "INDIA-PAKISTAN
TRUCE" CLAIM

Ranjit 'Ricky' Singh Gill, an Indian-origin adviser to US President Donald Trump was rewarded with National Security Council's 'Distinguished Action Award'

DECEMBER 31, 2025
WASHINGTON, D.C. (TIP)

Ranjit 'Ricky' Singh Gill, an Indian-origin adviser to US President Donald Trump, is grabbing headlines after being awarded for his supposed role in "India-Pakistan ceasefire negotiations" following Operation Sindoor earlier this year. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio presented the National Security Council's 'Distinguished Action Award' to thirty-eight-year-old Gill earlier this week in Washington.

The development comes even as New Delhi has consistently rejected the third-party mediation claims made by Donald Trump after the May conflict.

The Distinguished Action Award is among the National Security Council's highest internal recognitions, acknowledging exceptional service in advancing US national security objectives.

The recognition was for Gill's contribution to "internal coordination and diplomatic outreach" related to the India-Pakistan ceasefire framework during 2025, the US media reported, citing US officials.

Ricky Gill was born in Lodi, New Jersey, to parents Jasbir and Param Gill. He holds a bachelor's degree from Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs and a law degree from UC Berkeley, according to his LinkedIn profile.

In 2011, he ran for the US Congress from California's District 11 seat against Democrat Jerry McNerney but lost the tightly fought contest. He tried again four years later when the seat became the 9th District, but lost again.

In the first Trump administration, Gill served as Director for Russia and European Energy Security at the NSC and earlier as Senior Adviser at the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations. Currently, he oversees the India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and broader South and Central Asia portfolio at the department.

Since May 10, the US leader has repeated his claim of Washington mediating a "full and immediate" ceasefire between India and Pakistan over 70 times. (Read full story at www.theindianpanorama.news)

'New York vich munda rehnda': Punjabi performance goes viral at Zohran Mamdani's NYC inauguration

Toronto-based Punjabi artist Babbulicious takes the stage to perform his track 'Gaddi Red Challenger'

JANUARY 2, 2026
NEW YORK CITY (TIP)

In a moment celebrated by many across the global Punjabi diaspora, the inauguration of New York City's first Indian-origin mayor, Zohran Mamdani, concluded with a high-energy Punjabi music performance that has since gone viral on social media.

Toronto-based Punjabi artist Babbulicious, also known as Babbu Singh, took the stage on January 1 to perform his track "Gaddi Red Challenger", bringing a distinct South Asian flavor to the close of the formal ceremony. Wearing a striking fuchsia turban, the singer led the crowd in a chant of the chorus, "New York vich munda rehnda, sohniye Punjabi aayi ae".

Mamdani, the son of filmmaker Mira Nair, who has Punjabi roots, was seen dancing to the beats alongside his wife, artist Rama Duwaji.

The moment quickly gained traction online after Babbulicious shared a photograph with the mayor on X, captioned with the lyric: "NEW YORK VICH MUNDA REHNDAAAAA".

While the performance was widely praised as a celebratory nod to Mamdani's South Asian heritage, it also drew polarized reactions on social



Babbulicious performs at Zohran Mamdani's mayoral inauguration.

- Image via Instagram

media. A video posted on X attracted Islamophobic commentary, with one user falsely framing the event as an "Islamic takeover of America".

Republican politician Josh Barnett echoed the criticism in a reply to the post, questioning whether New Yorkers would "put up with this".

Supporters, however, were quick to

push back, with many using the viral moment to highlight Sikh identity, Punjabi culture and New York City's long-standing multicultural nature.

The Punjabi performance marks the latest in a series of cultural references embraced by Mamdani, who had earlier used the Bollywood track "Dhoom Machale" during his victory speech.

Indian American student Adithi
Garood wins first Future of Architecture
Scholarship instituted by Projio

DECEMBER 30, 2026
WASHINGTON, D.C. (TIP)

Indian American student Adithi Garood has won the first annual Future of Architecture Scholarship instituted by Projio, a digital marketing agency for architects and building professionals, for her ability to connect architectural vision with digital storytelling.

Garood is currently pursuing a master's degree in environmental building design at the University of Pennsylvania's Stuart Weitzman School of Design. She was selected from a pool of applicants across the U.S. who were tasked with exploring the theme of "Storytelling Through Digital Presence," according to a media release from the Port Washington, New York-based firm.

The scholarship was designed to support tech-forward students who bridge the gap between physical design and digital representation. Applicants were required to submit a written essay and a visual presentation detailing a strategy for presenting architectural work online, with a focus on experience, layout, and SEO.

"We were incredibly impressed by Adithi's ability to connect her design vision across both written and visual



Adithi Garood has won the first annual Future of Architecture Scholarship instituted by Projio

formats," said Victoria Silecchia, CMO of Omnizant. "Her submission demonstrated how digital platforms can help people truly understand and connect with architectural projects they may never experience firsthand. Adithi highlighted how this kind of storytelling is especially powerful for sustainable and net-zero design, where broader understanding can drive meaningful, widespread impact."

Projio stated that it launched this annual scholarship to empower the next generation of architectural visionaries who blend aesthetics with modern technology. By highlighting the importance of a digital presence, Projio aims to help future architects effectively communicate their value in an increasingly online world.

Garood is from Bangalore and has professional experience working with architecture practices in India prior to beginning her graduate studies in the United States. She previously worked as a junior architect with Arun Nalapat Architects in Bangalore and has also completed internships and freelance assignments in India. (Read full story at www.theindianpanorama.news)

Indo-Canadian Sikh taxi driver
in Calgary helps deliver baby
during winter storm

JANUARY 2,
2026
CALGARY (TIP)

A Sikh taxi driver from Calgary is being hailed as a hero after helping deliver a baby during a late-night ride to the hospital.

Hardeep Singh Toor was dispatched last Saturday for what he thought was a routine urgent trip, as per media reports.

Upon arrival, he discovered the woman was in active labor. With temperatures around -23°C, stormy weather, and icy roads, Toor focused on getting the couple to the hospital safely and quickly.

The ride to Peter Lougheed Centre, usually about 29 minutes, took a dramatic turn just blocks from the hospital when the baby was born in the back seat. Toor said he was relieved when the newborn began crying, signaling that both mother and child were okay.

Upon arrival, he alerted hospital staff, who immediately took over care. The baby's father expressed immense gratitude, and Toor learned the child was a healthy baby girl.



Hardeep Singh Toor is being hailed as a hero after helping deliver a baby during a late-night ride to the hospital.

January 31, 2026: A Date That will Give Sight to the Future

JANUARY 2, 2026

NEW YORK (TIP): On January 31, 2026, history will be made at the House of Lords, London-not through legislation alone, but through conscience, compassion, and collective global resolve. On this landmark day, world leaders, visionaries, humanitarians, and institutions will unite to commemorate and formally launch the International Day for a World Without Childhood Blindness (IDWWCB)-a movement anchored in hope and driven by one unshakable belief: no child should be denied sight because of where they are born.

The choice of January 31 is profoundly symbolic. It traces back to January 31, 1977, when a young ophthalmologist, Dr. V. K. Raju, conducted his first eye camp in Vijayawada, India-unknowingly igniting a mission that would span continents, generations, and millions of lives. Nearly five decades later, that humble act of service has evolved into a global moral movement.

Presiding over this historic commemoration is Lord Rami Ranger, Member of the UK House of Lords and Chair of IDWWCB, whose lifelong commitment to equity, inclusion, and humanitarian causes brings unmatched moral authority and global visibility to the movement. Standing alongside him as Co-Chair is Dr. V. K. Raju, Founder President of the Eye Foundation of America (EFA)-the lighthouse of inspiration whose life's work has proven that childhood blindness is not inevitable, but preventable.

GLOBAL LEADERSHIP AT THE HIGHEST LEVEL

Underscoring the global importance of this movement, the Chief Guest for the commemoration will be Mr. Siddharth Chatterjee, United Nations Resident Coordinator in China-a senior UN leader and a globally respected voice on sustainable development, equity, and human dignity.

In his address, Mr. Chatterjee will reaffirm the United Nations' commitment to childhood blindness elimination as a core development priority, emphasizing that:

"Preventing childhood blindness is among the most powerful and cost-effective interventions in global development-protecting not only sight, but education, dignity, productivity, and generational hope."

His presence powerfully aligns IDWWCB with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG-3 (Good Health and Well-Being) and SDG-4 (Quality Education), reinforcing that vision care is not charity-it is nation-building and future-building.

A VISIONARY PATRON AND HUMANITARIAN ICON

Adding further gravitas to the occasion is the presence of Padma Bhushan Dr. Vara Prasad Reddy, Founder Chairman of Shantha Biotechnics, global healthcare pioneer, and Patron of the Eye Foundation of America, who will attend as Guest of Honour.

A towering figure in India's public health and pharmaceutical revolution, Dr. Reddy's association reflects the movement's deep commitment to scalable,

affordable, and sustainable healthcare solutions. His journey-bringing life-saving vaccines to millions at affordable costs-mirrors the very philosophy of IDWWCB: high impact, low cost, global equity.

DR. REDDY'S MESSAGE WILL ECHO A POWERFUL TRUTH:

"If the world could democratize vaccines, it can democratize vision. Childhood blindness is solvable-what we need is collective will and institutional commitment."

A CONVERGENCE OF GLOBAL FORCES

The gathering at the House of Lords represents a rare and powerful convergence. Leaders from the United Nations, Lions Clubs International, Rotary

employability, and social inclusion. When a child cannot see, the consequences ripple across families, communities, and economies-often for a lifetime. Restoring sight, by contrast, delivers one of the highest returns on investment in global health.

PROOF THAT CHANGE IS POSSIBLE

Through the Eye Foundation of America and its partners, millions of children across India, Africa, the United States, the UK, and beyond have already been screened and treated. National ROP programs, school eye health initiatives, and community-based care models have demonstrated that eliminating childhood blindness within a generation is not aspirational-it is achievable, much like the eradication of polio.

The leadership of Lions International, Rotary's

INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR WORLD WITHOUT CHILDHOOD BLINDNESS

January 31, 2026

Historic Launch at the House of Lords, UK



Lord Rami Ranger
Parliament UK
Chair IDWWCB



Dr. V. K. Raju
Founder President EFA
Co-Chair IDWWCB



Siddharth Chatterjee
United Nations China



Padma Bhushan
K. Varaprasad Reddy
Patron EFA



AP Singh
Lions Intl President
2025-26



Sam Maddula
Board Member EFA



Dr. Leela V. Raju
Secretary General EFA

"Alone We Can Do So Little. Together We Can Do So Much" - Helen Keller



International, Eye Foundation of America, Eye Foundation UK, global medical institutions, CSR champions, philanthropists, and youth movements-including the Rotaract Club of World Without Childhood Blindness-will stand united under one shared conviction.

HELEN KELLER'S IMMORTAL WORDS RESONATE THROUGH THE HALL:

"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much."

WHY THIS MOVEMENT MATTERS NOW

Globally, an estimated 1.4 million children are blind, with millions more suffering from preventable or treatable visual impairment. Conditions such as refractive errors, congenital cataracts, vitamin A deficiency, and Retinopathy of Prematurity (ROP) continue to steal sight at the very start of life. The real tragedy lies not in the statistics-but in the fact that over 75% of childhood blindness is preventable or curable.

Vision is foundational to learning. Over 90% of a child's learning happens through sight, directly linking childhood eye health to education,

Unite for Good platform, visionary donors like Dr. Sam Maddula, and the disciplined stewardship of Dr. Leela V. Raju, President of EFA, ensure that this movement remains accountable, scalable, and results-driven.

Equally important is the leadership of youth-because this is not only a legacy movement, but a future-defining one.

A GLOBAL MORAL COMMITMENT

As the lights of the House of Lords illuminate this defining moment, January 31, 2026 will stand as more than a date-it will mark a global moral commitment.

A commitment that geography should not decide destiny.

That poverty should not determine sight.

That every child, everywhere, has the right to see, learn, and dream.

The International Day for a World Without Childhood Blindness is not the culmination of a journey-it is the beginning of global acceleration.

Because when the world comes together for sight, the future becomes brighter-for all.

FREE SPEECH AND MEDIA CONTROL

Freedom of speech and its consequent dissent-and-control argument just took a whole new turn

"THE RWB MAKES TWO POINTS ABOUT MEDIA FREEDOMS, BOTH OF THEM OBVIOUS, BUT WHICH BEAR REPEATING. THE FIRST, THAT THERE IS A DIRECT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND DEMOCRACY. A FEISTY PRESS FLOURISHES AROUND THE CUT AND THRUST OF ARGUMENT BETWEEN THE RULING PARTY AND THE OPPOSITION AND ESPECIALLY REVELS IN A DAVID-GOLIATH SITUATION, WHEN A SMALL BUT PLUCKY OPPOSITION WON'T LET A MAJORITARIAN RULING PARTY REST."

As we all wish each other a joyous new year, 2026, two bits of information cannot have escaped the mind's eye. The first, that India has overtaken Japan to become the fourth largest economy in the world, a fact that should certainly push each of us towards a self-congratulatory pat on the shoulder even as we sing, in unison, all the stanzas of Vande Mataram - no matter the uneven data glares at you as you look a bit deeper, for example the rising coefficient of inequality.

The second bit of news, somewhat more worrying, is the staggering 14,875 instances of free speech violations recorded through 2025, including nine killings (eight journalists and one social media influencer), 117 arrests, including eight journalists, and 11,385 instances of internet censorship.

This report, compiled by the Mumbai-based Free Speech Collective, is a sobering description of India's free speech landscape. I've written about this in these columns before - which is, that Article 19, a fundamental right in the Constitution which guarantees freedom of speech and expression, gives with one hand but takes away with the other. So, for example, while Article 19(1)(a) grants citizens the right to freely express their thoughts, opinions and ideas via speech, writing, printing, visual representations or any other means, "reasonable restrictions can be imposed on this right" in the interest of sovereignty and integrity of India, public order, decency or morality etc.

QUESTION IS, WHO IS TO DECIDE WHAT IS "PUBLIC ORDER"?

We know why these restrictions were placed in 1950 when the Constitution was born, when India was still emerging from the fires of the Partition. Over these past decades, some of those fires have been replaced by others, both real and make-believe. That's why journalists have always been at the frontlines of courage, pushing establishments to reveal more and more information in the interest of the people. Isn't that what democracy is about, anyway. Even Napoleon - or especially, Napoleon - knew that information is power.

Closer home, ruling parties have never shied away from controlling the narrative. The BJP is clearly the master of this universe. The Free Speech Collective in its report went on to add

on social media influencers and YouTube news channels.

And then of course there was the unusual threat last year by Telugu Desam MLA Gummanur Jayaram who said he would make reporters sleep on train tracks if they published "false information" on him.

In fact, 2025 began with the news that the body of an independent journalist from Chhattisgarh, Mukesh Chandrakar, 33, was found in a septic tank in Bijapur. Mukesh would often report on the "violence from the Naxal heartland", the Indian Express said, an indication of the threat from both sides of the fence.

Punjab's journalists are familiar with that situation, during the terrorism years and after.

The World Press Freedom Index that is put together by the international NGO

JYOTI
MALHOTRA



ruling party

rest.

The RWB's second finding is that there is a direct relationship between media censorship and funding. That "serious funding cuts" are a real blow to the media economy, already grappling with the expansion of influence of tech giants like Facebook and Google - and now AI. It's a no-brainer that the media is far freer in a market economy, which allows the diversification of its funding.

And then there's AI. The X handle of the Punjab unit of the Aam Aadmi Party @AAPunjab has broken new ground with an AI video that mimics - and criticizes - Opposition leaders, ending with Chief Minister Mann's real persona "speaking for Punjab". It's not a cartoon. Congress leaders Charanjit Channi and



Dissent: There is a direct relationship between freedom of speech and democracy.

-File photo

that in May 2025, the Centre asked X, the social media giant, to withhold over 8,000 accounts and another 2,354 in July. X also told the Karnataka High Court that it had received 29,118 requests from the government to remove content from January-June 2025 and had complied with 26,641.

Blocking orders from the Union Ministry of Information Technology, shutdowns and bans on apps have been rampant.

Nor are ruling parties in non-BJP-ruled states exempt from the temptation. The Ludhiana police have filed an FIR against 10 persons, of which nine are journalists, for posting "distorted and unverified content" about stories that Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann's helicopter was being used when he was on an official visit to Japan and South Korea from December 1-10. It is not known who was using the official chopper. Instead of clarifying what is going on, the sledgehammer has fallen

Reporters Without Borders (RWB) illustrates why India's press freedoms teeter between the devil and the deep blue sea. The good news is that India's media freedom rank has fallen from 159 (out of 180 countries) in 2024 to 151 in 2025. In South Asia, only Pakistan and Afghanistan fare worse. India, the world's largest democracy, finds itself in the company of Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Sudan, Syria and North Korea - as well as Russia. (India's fast friend, Vladimir Putin, has been in power in one way or another for the last 26 years.)

The RWB makes two points about media freedoms, both of them obvious, but which bear repeating. The first, that there is a direct relationship between freedom of speech and democracy. A feisty press flourishes around the cut and thrust of argument between the ruling party and the Opposition and especially revels in a David-Goliath situation, when a small but plucky Opposition won't let a majoritarian

Amrinder Raja Warring as well as Akali Dal leader Sukhbir Badal - almost - look like the way they do in real life. Worse, there are no disclaimers.

This deepfake mixing of truth with fiction is already familiar in the non-political space - we saw its use in media stories during Op Sindoor last year. But if political parties are also going to start employing AI video in the pursuit of influence, then it's clear that not just the rules, the nature of the game is being fundamentally changed.

The task to separate truth from fiction in the free speech Lakshman Rekha just became tougher. The freedom of speech and its consequent dissent-and-control argument just took a whole new turn.

(Jyoti Malhotra is Editor-in-Chief of The Tribune group of newspapers. She has worked with India's top newspapers, across print, TV and digital, both in English and Hindi media, and is a regular contributor on BBC Radio. Her X & Insta handles are @jomalhotra & email is jyoti.malhotra@tribunemail.com)

A multipolar world with bipolar characteristics

THE THREE GREAT POWERS UNDERSTAND THAT THE WORLD IS NO LONGER ORGANIZED AROUND A SINGLE CENTER OF AUTHORITY

STANLY
JOHNY



As 2025 draws to a close, a highlight is that the United States has undertaken its largest troop mobilization in the Caribbean in decades. Its Navy has deployed its most advanced aircraft carrier, along with fighter jets, amphibious vessels, attack submarines and tens of thousands of troops, as it intensifies its pressure on Venezuela in an effort to force President Nicolás Maduro from power.

The Trump administration's National Security Strategy (NSS), released in early December 2025, identifies Latin America and the Caribbean as a strategic priority. Reviving the 19th century Monroe Doctrine, the document asserts that the U.S. must deny influence or control by outside powers (read China) in Latin America and ensure that the Western Hemisphere remains under American political, economic and military influence.

The push to reinforce American primacy in Latin America coincides with U.S. President Donald Trump's waning interest in Europe, another long-standing U.S. sphere of influence. Since the end of the Second World War, the U.S. has served as Europe's primary security guarantor. If Washington kept western Europe together through a tightly knit alliance during the Cold War, it expanded this security umbrella to eastern Europe after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, creating a large transatlantic bloc. Under Mr. Trump, however, the U.S. is no longer interested in shouldering the burden of European security - a position explicitly articulated in the NSS. Why is America, at a moment when Russia and China are seeking to overturn the U.S.-built and U.S.-led security and economic order, stepping back from Europe while moving to consolidate its influence in the Western Hemisphere?

It is difficult to discern a cohesive doctrine in Mr. Trump's foreign policy, marked by the President's impulses and unpredictability. Yet, even these impulses, this unpredictability and his ideological orientation rooted in Christian nationalism and America's might cannot ignore the structural shifts reshaping the international order. Mr. Trump is not the 'President of peace' that he claims to be - he has already bombed six countries, even if he has stopped short of a full-scale war.

At the same time, Mr. Trump, despite his rhetoric about American military and economic dominance, recognizes that he no longer lives in a unipolar world. His reluctant aggression and strategic recalibration are reflections of the changes now taking shape in the global balance of power.

THREE GREAT POWERS

When the Soviet Union disintegrated in 1991, a new order emerged with the U.S. at its center. There was no other great power positioned to challenge American primacy. The unipolar moment, however, has since passed. While future historians may better identify the precise point of rupture, one such moment was Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014. The ensuing conflict in eastern Ukraine, the tepid western response, and Russia's ability to endure despite sanctions reinforced the limits of the 'rules-based order'.

The end of unipolarity, however, does not mean the end of American dominance. The U.S. remains, and will remain, for the foreseeable future, the world's pre-eminent military and economic power. What has changed is that Washington is no longer the sole great power shaping geopolitical outcomes. China and Russia now occupy that space as well, deepening what Realist thinkers describe as the inherently anarchic nature of the international system.

During the Cold War, the Soviet Union was America's principal rival, and in the 1970s, Washington reached out to China to exploit fissures within the communist bloc. Today, the U.S. identifies China as its principal and systemic challenger. This, in turn, leaves open the possibility of a reset in ties with Russia - an idea embraced by Mr. Trump's MAGA (Make America Great Again) ideologues, who frame Russia as part of a

shared 'Christian civilization'.

THE REIGNING POWER VERSUS THE RISING POWER

The U.S. faces a unique challenge in China. The Soviet economy, in its prime in the early 1970s, reached about 57% of the U.S. GDP, before it began slowing down. China's economy, now the world's second largest, already amounts to about 66% of the U.S. economy. China continues to grow at a faster pace, steadily narrowing the gap.

As China's economic power expands, it is being converted into military capability (it has already built the world's largest Navy, by number of ships). Like other great powers, Beijing is seeking to establish regional hegemony and global dominance. So, a prolonged contest between the U.S., the reigning power, and China, the rising power, appears unavoidable. The

But unlike the post-Second World War and post-Cold War transitions, the structures of the new order have yet to fully emerge. During the Cold War, the world was divided into two ideological blocs and two largely separate economic systems. Today, China lacks the kind of satellite state networks that characterized the 20th century superpowers, while the U.S. is reassessing the sustainability of its alliance frameworks, including its commitment to Europe.

Russia, with its own great power ambitions, is wary of being seen as a Chinese ally irrespective of its close strategic partnership with Beijing. This opens a window for a Washington-Moscow reset. But the war in Ukraine remains a stumbling block. Russia may not want to challenge America's global leadership, but it certainly wants to re-establish its primacy in its sphere of influence.

Thus, there are three great powers with divergent



'The end of unipolarity does not mean the end of American dominance'

-Photo Credit: AP

situation is comparable to 19th century Europe, when a rising imperial Germany threatened to upstage Britain during Pax Britannica, unsettling the 'Concert of Europe'.

Russia is the weakest link among the three powers. It is a relatively smaller economy with a shrinking sphere of influence. But Russia's nuclear arsenals, expansive geography, abundant energy and mineral resources and its demonstrated willingness to use force to achieve its strategic objectives keep it in the great power constellation. From Moscow's perspective, the country drifted into the wilderness in the 1990s before announcing its return in 2008 with the war in Georgia. Since then, it has sought to rewrite the post-Soviet security architecture in Europe. As the West, having expanded the North Atlantic Treaty Organization into the Russian sphere of influence, responded to Vladimir Putin's war in Ukraine with sweeping sanctions on Russia and military support for Kyiv, Moscow moved ever closer to China. Russia and China have found common ground in opposing the western 'rules-based order' - Russia thinks that the order denies it its rightful place in the world and seeks to revise it accordingly, while China, by contrast, as Rush Doshi argues in *The Long Game*, wants to replace it with a China-centric order.

FLUID MULTIPOLARITY

All three great powers today understand that the world is no longer organized around a single center of authority. In that sense, the world is already multipolar.

interests that are pulling the global order in different directions, rendering the emerging multipolarity fluid rather than as a structured system akin to the post-Second World War order. This also means that middle powers, including superpower allies such as Japan and Germany, and autonomous actors such as India and Brazil, would continue to hedge their bets.

Mr. Trump wants Europe to shoulder greater responsibility for its own security, reset relations with Russia and reassert American primacy in its immediate neighborhood even as Washington prepares for a prolonged great power competition with China. The idea is to return to the classic offshore balancing. Even if Mr. Trump fails in executing it, future American Presidents may not be able to ignore the shifts that he has initiated. Russia, for its part, seeks to carve out a sphere of influence. China aims to preserve its close strategic partnership with Russia to keep the Eurasian landmass within its orbit, while establishing regional hegemony in East and Southeast Asia - moves that would cement its status as a long-term superpower, much as the U.S. did by asserting its hegemony in the Western Hemisphere in the 19th century, and across the Atlantic in the 20th century. In this fluid landscape, Russia has emerged as the new 'swing great power' between the two superpowers, paradoxically lending the emerging multipolar order a distinctly bipolar character.

(Stanly Johny is editor with The Hindu. Article republished courtesy The Hindu)

Silence, Spectacle, and Suffering: The Reality of Christmas 2025

GEORGE
ABRAHAM



One of the most tragic developments of the Christmas season of 2025 was the spate of targeted attacks, vandalism, and intimidation faced by Christians across India, allegedly carried out by elements affiliated with the Sangh Parivar. These incidents shocked freedom-loving people around the world and raised serious concerns about the state of religious liberty in the country.

The duplicity of the BJP government was starkly on display when Prime Minister Narendra Modi attended a Christmas prayer service at the Cathedral Church of the Redemption in New Delhi, even as such acts of violence and intimidation were being orchestrated elsewhere by his ideological faithful. The Prime Minister's appearance at the service appeared less an act of solidarity and more a carefully crafted publicity gesture aimed at the international audience.

His continued silence in the face of these attacks has emboldened those seeking to normalize hatred, undermine India's pluralistic traditions, and marginalize a community that has made immense contributions to the nation's social, educational, and economic development. Christianity in India is not a colonial import but a faith with a rich and continuous presence dating back to A.D. 52. Yet today, the actions and rhetoric emanating from Modi and his ideological cohort suggest a deliberate attempt not merely to erase Christmas from public life, but to push Christians out of visible civic space altogether, systematically marginalizing them and constraining their role and influence in Indian society at large.

Prior to the Christmas Day attacks, BJP governments at both the Centre and in several states had undertaken a series of provocative actions that lend credence to the pattern of events that followed. In 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared December 25 as "Good Governance Day," a move widely perceived as an attempt to dilute the public recognition of Christmas. More recently, in Uttar Pradesh, schools were kept open on December 25, 2025, to commemorate the birth centenary of Atal Bihari Vajpayee rather than observe Christmas as a holiday. Such measures reflect a growing hostility toward Christianity and a deliberate effort to marginalize its public presence.

Under the current BJP government, Chhattisgarh has emerged as a testing ground for policies aimed at suppressing Christian life. Christian families have been denied even the most basic right to bury their dead, an egregious illustration of entrenched discrimination and communal hostility. Credible reports indicate that local councils in districts such as Kanker and Sukma have passed resolutions, or exerted intense social pressure, to prevent Christians from residing in villages or freely practicing their faith. Against this backdrop, it is hardly surprising that masked men were able to enter Magneto Mall in Raipur and



Bajrang Dal members attacking an image of Santa at Magneto Mall in Raipur

vandalize Christmas decorations, including trees and other festive displays, with apparent impunity.

The targeted cancellation and non-renewal of FCRA licenses for thousands of Christian NGOs constitutes another grave assault on a community that runs mission hospitals, schools, and colleges, plays a vital role in disaster relief, and contributes enormously to charitable work nationwide. In many cases, authorities freeze FCRA bank accounts even before inquiries are concluded, preventing hospitals from purchasing medicines, schools from paying staff, and charities from providing food and essential services often without any proven wrongdoing.

The delayed issuance of a visa to prominent American Christian leader Rev. Franklin Graham, issued only after the scheduled event had passed, is another troubling example of how India treats Christian leaders from the West. For more than a decade, India has routinely deported American Christian visitors, alleging missionary intent. Those associated with churches or Christian charities are often instructed to apply for missionary visas, yet nearly all such applications are rejected, effectively barring Christian engagement.

And yet, we celebrated every Christmas remembering a Christ marked by simplicity and humility-born not in the luxury of a palace but in a

manger. He was welcomed by the lowly and soon faced the threat of violence from the powerful. From its very beginning, the Christmas story has been intertwined with suffering, displacement, and quiet courage: God fully immersed in humanity, yet revealing a divine gift to the world.

Across the globe today, countless Christians mark this sacred season amid untold suffering and persecution. In many parts of the Middle East, Asia, and Africa, professing the Christian faith invites harassment, imprisonment, or even death. Churches are burned or shuttered, Bibles are confiscated or destroyed, and families are displaced or torn apart simply for confessing the name of Christ.

Across Europe, the persistent threat of Islamic terrorism has further stifled public celebrations, from France to Germany and Austria. A continent rich in Christian heritage appeared to have surrendered its traditions under mounting security concerns. In Germany, Christmas markets are ringed with concrete barriers and guarded by heavily armed police. In Salzburg, Austria, the famed Christmas market was monitored by extensive surveillance systems and round-the-clock security personnel. In Paris, authorities canceled Christmas-New Year celebrations along the Champs-Élysées this year out of fear of potential violence.

Chinese Communist authorities have been reportedly raiding homes and makeshift churches during the Christmas season, arresting hundreds of believers and subjecting them to interrogation, sanctions, or imprisonment. Prominent clergy have been detained alongside ordinary worshippers. Official government statements describe these actions as routine law enforcement against illegal gatherings or unauthorized communications, while human rights and religious freedom organizations characterize them as systematic persecution of faith communities.

In Nigeria, genocide against Christians is being perpetrated by Islamist militias. Rapes, mutilations, and murders occur with alarming regularity. The attacks on Christians in northern Nigeria are not isolated incidents but part of a brutal daily reality. Villages are burned, people are killed or kidnapped, and countless survivors are displaced with little protection or hope for peace. It is estimated that at least 125,000 Christians have been killed over the past decade, yet the world remains largely silent in the face of this continuing tragedy.

Syria, once known as a cradle of Christianity, now faces the grim possibility of erasing what remains of its Christian heritage. A former terrorist leader, once carrying a multi-million-dollar bounty, now presides over the new Islamic order. The questionable policies of the United States, supporting extremist factions such as the Al-Nusra Front and facilitating the fall of the Assad regime, have had dire consequences for religious minorities. The bombing of the Mar Elias Greek Orthodox Church near Damascus and other targeted killings point to a bleak future for Christians, who have become collateral damage in broader geopolitical calculations.

Despite these trials and tribulations, Christian faith has never depended on safety or privilege. The earliest believers worshipped in catacombs and homes, sustained not by power but by hope. The persecuted Church today stands firmly in that same tradition, bearing witness through endurance, forgiveness, and an unshakable belief that light shines brightest in darkness.

For those of us who were fortunate to celebrate Christmas freely in 2025, this season calls us to remembrance and responsibility. Our response must go beyond sentiment, beyond candlelight and carols, toward prayer, advocacy, compassion, and a refusal to grow indifferent to injustice. Christmas proclaims that the Light has come into the world, and though darkness may resist it with violence and fear, it will not overcome it. That is the enduring hope of Christmas and the quiet strength of the persecuted Church.

(George Abraham is a former Chief Technology Officer, United Nations. He is Vice Chair of IOCUA. He can be reached at gta777@gmail.com)

A Season of Faith and Festivity: How the World Celebrated Christmas 2025

The world celebrated Christmas 2025 with a blend of faith, festivity and cultural diversity, as millions marked the birth of Jesus Christ while embracing local traditions. In Europe and the Americas, churches held midnight masses, cities glowed with lights, and families gathered for festive meals. Vatican City hosted the Pope's Christmas Mass, drawing global attention. Across Asia, Africa and the Middle East, Christian communities observed the day with prayers, carols and charity, often alongside multicultural celebrations. From decorated streets and Christmas markets to quiet worship and acts of giving, Christmas 2025 reflected a shared spirit of peace, hope and goodwill across the world.





Three scientists of Indian descent among 80 appointed to Order of Canada



Three scientists of Indian descent are among 80 appointed to Order of Canada

**JANUARY 1, 2026
OTTAWA (TIP)**

When Canada talks about taking "brains" or top "scientists" under its refabricated program, it probably refers to the likes of thoracic surgeon Shaf Keshavjee, inventor and electrical engineer Praveen Jain, and professor of public health Chandrakant Padamashi Shah, who have over the years not only made a name in their respective fields but have also contributed immensely to the country they opted to make their home.

They figure in the list of 80 appointed to the Order of Canada by the Governor General, Mary Simon, on the last day of the last year. Also in the list is the top Canadian sprinter, Andre de Grasse, winner of seven Olympic medals.

Mary Simon made these new appointments to the Order of Canada that include 6 Companions, 15 Officers, and 59 Members. Six appointments are promotions within the Order, and another represents an honorary appointment.

The Order of Canada is the cornerstone of the Canadian Honours System. Since its creation in 1967, more than 8,250 people from all sectors of society have been appointed to the Order. The contributions of these trailblazers are varied, yet they have all enriched the lives of others and made a difference to this country.

"The Order of Canada fosters a sense of pride and cohesion in our country. Every appointment celebrates not only the talent, expertise, and dedication of individuals but also the countless lives they have touched through their work, vision, and contributions. Their commitment extends beyond borders, inspiring progress in our communities, our country, and around the world. I offer my heartfelt congratulations to each new appointee on this well-deserved recognition," says Mary Simon while making the appointments.

The Order of Canada is one of the country's highest honors. It recognizes people across all sectors of society who have made extraordinary and sustained

contributions to our nation. Its motto, *Desiderantes Meliorem Patriam*, translates to "They desire a better country."

A member or an officer of the Order of Canada can be promoted to a higher level if he or she demonstrates further exceptional achievement. Nominations for a promotion can be considered a minimum of five years after the last appointment.



Thoracic surgeon Shaf Keshavjee

Thoracic surgeon Shaf Keshavjee is a world-renowned lung transplant specialist whose groundbreaking work has transformed transplant surgery globally. He continues to expand possibilities within regenerative medicine, particularly through advancements in lung preservation during critical transplant procedures. He also excels as an educator and hospital administrator, shaping the future of health care through innovation and leadership. Currently, he is the Surgeon-in-Chief of the Sprott Department of Surgery, the Director of the Toronto Lung Transplant Program and Latner Thoracic Research Laboratories at UHN, and a Professor of Thoracic Surgery at the University of Toronto.

Furthermore, he is a member of the Order of Ontario and has been awarded two Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medals. In 2020, he received the prestigious Governor General of Canada's Innovation Award. Other notable recognitions include UHN's Inventor of the Year Award, Canada's Top 40 Under 40, and the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Canadian Society of Transplantation.

Keshavjee was 12 when he moved to Toronto from Kenya with his mother and his businessman father. The young Shaf was drawn to the sciences at North Toronto Collegiate. "I always knew I wanted to be a surgeon," he recalls. "Not just a doctor, but a surgeon."

As a dedicated student, he hardly faced any problems getting into medical school at the University of Toronto. Though transplant surgery was never a consideration until the afternoon of November 7, 1983, when he was driving over a bridge on Mount Pleasant Avenue and heard on the radio that surgeon Dr Joel Cooper and his team had conducted the world's first successful single lung surgery at Toronto General Hospital (TGH).

"I thought, wow, that's cool," media quoted him saying about his early days.

The risky procedure had been tried 44 times before without success. Three of those failures had been in Toronto. Most patients did not survive for more than two weeks.

Three years later, Keshavjee was on hand when history was made the second time at TGH. He was a surgery resident

when he scrubbed into the operating room to witness the world's first successful double lung transplant surgery on November 26, 1986. That day, Keshavjee stayed mostly on the sidelines, watching the "giants" of thoracic surgery in action. On the operating table lay Canadian Ann Harrison, whose lungs had been virtually destroyed by emphysema.

Doctors told her that without surgery, she could just survive for a few months. Intriguingly, they also told her that even with the surgery, she may not be able to make it beyond the surgery table. She did and lived on for another 14 years.

"By this time, all the other organs had been transplanted, but the lungs hadn't," says Keshavjee. "The first kidney and heart transplants were done in the '50s."

He completed his medical training at the University of Toronto in 1985 and specialized in general surgery, cardiac surgery, and thoracic surgery. He participated in the world's first successful double lung transplant at Toronto General Hospital in 1986. Dr Keshavjee completed fellowships at Harvard University and the University of London. During his master's studies, Dr. Keshavjee developed a lung preservation solution for donor lungs that has now been translated into clinical use around the world. Since then, he has led the development and translation of many innovations to the clinic, including the Ex Vivo Lung



Inventor and electrical engineer Praveen Jain

Another appointee to the Order of Canada is Praveen Jain, a leading inventor in electrical energy processing who has advanced efficient power generation, transmission, and use through electronics. A Queen's

University professor and founder of its Centre for Energy and Power Electronics Research, he has shaped the field while mentoring more than 100 trainees, earning recognition as an outstanding educator and innovator.

For the past 24 years, Praveen Jain has been actively involved in the research and development of high-frequency power conversion technologies. He is considered one of the leading authorities in the world in the practical applications of power electronics.

Jain has a natural ability to envision simple solutions to complex technical problems and then transfer these solutions into new designs. This ability has made him a tremendous asset to both academe and industry, to which he has successfully transferred technology from the university laboratory.

His work has resulted in 25 patents and over 200 publications. His designs have been successfully applied to telecom power supplies, induction melting, computers, and space systems throughout the world.

At Queen's University, where he is a professor of electrical and computer

**PRABHJOT
SINGH**



engineering and Canada research chair in power electronics, Jain was able to attract millions of dollars in funding to conduct research and develop Canada's first high-frequency power electronics laboratory. He has also supervised and guided over 50 graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, and power electronics engineers in academic and industrial research.

He has received many awards and honors for his work, including a prestigious Tier 1 Canada Research Chair in Power Electronics at Queen's University, an Innovation Award from the Canada Foundation for Innovation, and an Ontario Distinguished Researcher Award from the Ontario Innovation Trust. He has also been named a Fellow of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE).



Public health professor Chandrakant Padamashi Shah

The third appointee of Indian descent, Chandrakant Padamashi Shah, Professor Emeritus at the University of Toronto's Dalla Lana School of Public Health, transformed public health education nationwide and championed Indigenous health throughout his career. He reshaped Canada's citizenship exam and established the country's first endowed Indigenous health chair, leaving a profound legacy of inclusion, scholarship, and systemic reform.

"The ninth of fifteen children in a small town in Maharashtra, India, Chandrakant Shah managed to attend medical school through diligent study, sometimes under an oil lamp. Like many others of his age, he went abroad for better opportunities, finally arriving in Canada, where he joined the School of Public Health at the University of Toronto. In Canada, he was immediately struck by the inequities in health and social services for the poor and the Aboriginal populations.

Through the University of Toronto, he became involved with the Sioux Lookout Zone Program in Northwestern Ontario by volunteering his pediatric services to the remote and isolated First Nations communities. This sparsely populated region became his second home for a number of years. Throughout his professorship at the university, he worked tirelessly to draw attention to existing inequalities and to rectify them. In addition, he made important contributions to the teaching of public health in Canada and wrote the first comprehensive textbook on the subject that is now in its sixth edition. He retired in 2001 and was invited to work as a primary care physician at Anishnawbe Health Toronto (AHT), an Aboriginal community health center.

(Prabhot Singh, is a Toronto-based senior journalist. He can be reached at Prabhot416@gmail.com)

Looking ahead: Challenges galore for those seeking immigration

DECEMBER 31, 2025
TORONTO (TIP)

"Poaching the best and ignoring the rest" appears to be the new immigration mantra of the developed and flourishing West that it wants to portray and implement in 2026. Conveying a strong message to the nations overflowing with manpower resources, both raw and skilled, the elite group of nations-most sought after by prospective immigrants-has been gradually barricading the borders to minimize the "infiltration." To cap it, member nations of this group have set in motion both legal and inhumane deportation processes to get rid of what they call "dead wood," as most of their ageing sections of society have met their requirements of the workforce.

When the new Liberal government, led by Mark Carney, assumed office in April this year and presented its maiden budget in November, it clearly indicated that it would "look for the best of brains" to head new groups of scientific research. Bowing to the pressures, the Liberal government not only scaled down immigration levels but also introduced drastic cuts to the intake of international students. This major shift in the immigration rigmarole spells doom for hundreds of thousands of youngsters who want or aspire to make one of the developed Western nations their new home. Those with no skills find the immigration doors closed for them for now.

Donald Trump, soon after starting his second term in office in January of the outgoing year, started sending through full loads of US Air Force aircraft, bereft of basic passenger facilities, with immigration seekers without proper documents to the countries of their origin, including India. And the process has been continuing unabated since then. Hundreds of thousands have



The Immigration Puzzle

-Illustration: Alex Albadree/ Stanford Magazine

already been sent home unceremoniously. Aircraft loads of "unwanted immigrants" are even now leaving the shores of various North American ports for destinations in South Asia, Africa, and other parts of the world regularly. Incidentally, those being deported exclude the brain doctors, engineers, and scientists.

It is not only the closure of a channel that was taking a lot of loads off the governments of developing nations, but it has now started rebuilding the pressure on shrinking job opportunities and resources in these immigration feeder nations. While their best talent would be leaving the shores of the country, they would be left with numbers that they would find extremely difficult to adjust to under the tightening global economic norms.

The brain drain would continue unabated, thus putting additional pressure on these fund- and resource-starved nations. Producing a doctor with

six to eight years in a government medical institution in India costs the state a minimum of Rs 20 lakh. The same is the case with an engineer or IT specialist groomed at a government institution; the money spent by the state is no less than that of a doctor. And once these young, bright doctors, engineers, and IT experts step out of their institutions, the developed nations are out poaching for them. Instead of repaying the society that spent on their training and grooming, they leave their homelands, lured by green pastures overseas.

The result is obvious. Their home turfs suffer from a shortage of doctors, engineers, technocrats, and other professionals. A simple case to illustrate this dilemma is the acute shortage of mental health officers in the country. Despite directions from the Apex Court that each district in the country must have a mental hospital, not even 20 per cent of districts in the country have such

a facility. There is an acute shortage of super specialists in a country like India. Many medical colleges fake figures to show specialists and super specialists on their faculties, while in fact their services are requisitioned mostly from the private sector at the time of inspections.

It is not health care. Other areas, especially information technology, science and research, engineering, and related areas, would continue to be impacted by the changed immigration policies of Western nations.

Other than these technical or scientific "brains," countries like India are also facing an acute shortage of middle-rung officers in their defense forces. One foremost reason is that pay packages are perhaps not as attractive as their counterparts' pass-outs from IITs. Then some of the perks associated with jobs in the defense sector have been spiked so much that their added attractions have vanished in recent years. Even a lifetime career in the defense forces is not guaranteed under the Agnipath Yojana. Intriguingly, some of the able-bodied youth, looking for green pastures overseas and shirking jobs in uniform at home, were forced to join the armed forces overseas, as it happened in the case of Russia.

There is an urgent need for a fresh look at the immigration policies of the nations abundant with manpower or human resources. A country like India needs to regulate its brain drain as well as the outflow of its raw human resources. It also comes with a need to audit the education and healthcare infrastructure in the country. India, for example, can market both its education and health care potentials as a retort to the Western world.

Otherwise, developing economies would continue to lose the best to the West and keep the rest for their own use.

PRABHJOT
SINGH



Marc Miller, Minister of Canadian Identity and Culture and Minister responsible for Official Languages, congratulated the Tamil community and its leaders as they begin celebrations of Tamil Heritage Month. -Photo : Instagram

JANUARY 2, 2026
OTTAWA (TIP)

On January 1, 2026, Marc Miller, Minister of Canadian Identity and Culture, issued a formal statement to mark the beginning of Tamil Heritage Month. Canada's rich diversity is

Canadian Minister for Identity and Culture Greet Tamil Community on their Heritage Month

reflected in the number of communities that dot its territory making it a true multiethnic and multicultural society. These communities add to the rich cultural heritage of Canada as they celebrate their festivals and hold their cultural events from time to time.

Starting with the New Year, it is Tamil community that celebrates its Heritage month. To mark the celebrations, Marc Miller, Minister of Canadian Identity and Culture and Minister responsible for Official Languages, congratulated the community and its leaders.

In a statement, he said "As Tamil Heritage Month begins today, I join all Canadians in wishing a wonderful month to Tamil communities across the country.

"Home to one of the largest Tamil diasporas outside Asia, Canada has been a welcoming destination since 1983 for communities fleeing violence and instability. Through their resilience,

determination, and commitment, Canadians of Tamil origin have helped build vibrant communities and strengthen our country's cultural mosaic.

"The contributions of the Tamil diaspora are felt in all areas: the arts, education, entrepreneurship, science, and beyond. Carried by one of the oldest languages still spoken today, Tamil heritage is a living legacy, rich in knowledge, traditions, and creativity, which continues to enrich our national heritage and shape our collective future.

"As we celebrate this richness, we recognize that racism and discrimination remain a reality for too many racialized people in Canada. Our government is committed to building a society where everyone can live, express themselves, and celebrate their culture in safety. That is why the Government of Canada launched Changing Systems, Transforming Lives: Canada's Anti-

Racism Strategy 2024-2028 in 2024 and developed the first-ever Canada's Action Plan on Combatting Hate to fight racism, celebrate our diversity, and give communities the resources they need to prevent and stand against hate and intolerance.

"Throughout January, I invite all Canadians to discover the diversity and vitality of Tamil communities and their cultures across the country. I also wish a happy Thai Pongal (Lohri for Punjabis) celebrated in mid-January, to all people of Tamil origin here in Canada and around the world," he added.

Tamil community is well represented in local, provincial and federal politics. The Canadian Minister for Public Safety, Gary Anandasangaree, is of the Tamil descent.

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

Strengthening India-Romania Economic and Technology Partnerships

DECEMBER 25, 2025
BUCHAREST (TIP)

In a key highlight last week, the Embassy hosted prominent Romanian business leaders for a special presentation on India's rising economy, delivered by Mr. Bhuvnesh Kumar, Deputy Secretary, Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), Ministry of Commerce and Industry. Ambassador



Ambassador Dr. Manoj Kumar Mohapatra delivered the opening remarks

Manoj Kumar Mohapatra delivered the opening remarks, underscoring India's dynamic growth trajectory, projected at over 7% GDP growth in 2025, followed by an interactive Q&A session. The event advanced discussions on trade, investment, and



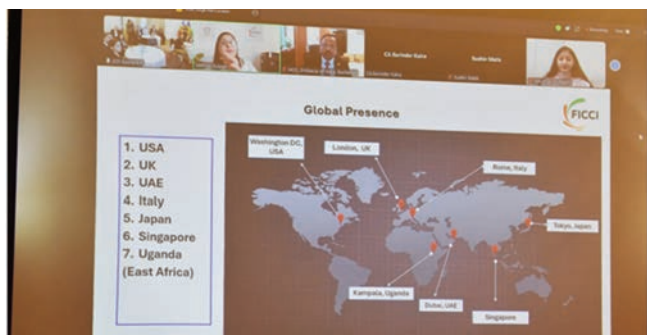
ICC Country Head Mr. Gheorghe Dinu spoke about the opportunities for Romanian companies to engage with the Indian market

collaboration opportunities between the two nations. ICC Country Head Mr. Gheorghe Dinu, Mr. Naimish Kumar Patel from Dimar Recruitment & Immigration Services, Mr. Morten Reimers of Falcon Defense, and



Ms. Adriana Radu of RIZ spoke about opportunities for Romanian companies to engage with the Indian market

Ms. Adriana Radu of RIZ highlighted emerging opportunities for Romanian companies to engage with the Indian market. These partners played a pivotal role in fostering stronger India-Romania business ties.



FICCI highlighted their reach on a global level



Mr. Bhuvnesh Kumar, Deputy Secretary, Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade spoke about the GDP growth of India over the years

Spotlight on IT & ITES Collaboration: A Strategic Pillar of Bilateral Growth

Complementing this initiative, the Embassy, in collaboration with the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FICCI) and the Electronics and Computer Software Export Promotion Council, successfully organized a Business-to-Business (B2B)



Mr. Naimish Kumar Patel from Dimar Recruitment & Immigration Services spoke about opportunities for Romanian companies to engage with the Indian market

Meeting focused on Information Technology and Communications (IT&C), including IT Enabled Services (ITES). The event brought together over more than 100 leading Indian and Romanian companies, creating a dynamic platform for interaction, knowledge exchange, and the exploration of new partnership opportunities.



Attendees at the B2B Meeting

The India-Romania IT & ITES partnership has evolved naturally from shared strengths. India's global leadership in software exports and its vast talent pool of over 5 million IT professionals complement Romania's highly skilled workforce of 200,000+ IT specialists and its position as one of Europe's fastest-growing technology hubs. This synergy has already delivered tangible results.

Indian companies operating in Romania, including Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), Infosys, Wipro, and HCL Technologies, have generated over 10,000 high-quality jobs for Romanian professionals as of 2025, primarily in cities such as Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, and Timișoara. These roles span software development, cybersecurity, cloud computing, artificial intelligence, and BPO services, contributing significantly to Romania's economy through direct employment, skill development, and technology transfer. The B2B meeting further amplified these achievements by facilitating targeted matchmaking sessions, enabling participants to identify immediate opportunities in AI-driven solutions, digital transformation projects, and



Ambassador conducted an interactive question-and-answer session

nearshoring services for EU markets.

Future Horizons: Building Momentum Towards India's AI Summit and Localized Initiatives

These engagements serve as important lead-up activities to the Government of India's landmark AI Summit, scheduled for February 2026. This flagship national event will bring together global leaders, innovators, and policymakers to shape ethical AI governance, promote inclusive deployment, and advance transformative applications across sectors, closely aligning with shared India-Romania priorities in IT and ITES.

Building on this momentum, the Embassy of India plans to organize "AI for All" Conferences in key Romanian technology hubs: Brașov on January 14, 2026, and Timișoara in the first week of February 2026. Organized in association with leading Indian



Mr. Morten Reimers of Falcon Defense spoke about opportunities for Romanian companies to engage with the Indian market

companies such as Global Logitech and Wipro, these events will focus on democratizing access to AI, fostering hands-on workshops, and exploring



Ambassador Dr. Manoj Kumar Mohapatra at the IT&C event held at the embassy spoke about India's development in the industry

collaborative R&D in areas including AI ethics, healthcare applications, and smart cities. By convening local startups, universities, and industry experts, these conferences aim to accelerate technology transfer, strengthen bilateral talent pipelines, and position Romania as a co-innovation partner within India's expanding AI ecosystem.

These initiatives underscore the shared commitment of India and Romania to deepening economic and technological cooperation, leveraging India's growth momentum and Romania's strategic position within Europe. The Embassy remains fully committed to nurturing these partnerships to ensure sustained and mutually beneficial prosperity.

(Based on a Press Release issued by the Embassy of India in Bucharest)

Ambassador Dr. Manoj Kumar Mohapatra Visits Romanian Municipalities to Explore Cooperation Opportunities

DECEMBER 24, 2025
BUCHAREST (TIP)

Dr. Manoj Kumar Mohapatra, Ambassador of India to Romania, undertook visits to the Romanian municipalities of Caracal, Râmnicu Vâlcea and the commune of Dobrosloveni, with a view to exploring opportunities for cooperation in economic, educational, cultural and people-to-people domains.



Dr. Manoj Kumar Mohapatra, Ambassador of India to Romania met Mayor of Caracal Mr. Ion Doldurea

In Caracal, Ambassador Mohapatra met with the city's leadership, including Mayor Mr. Ion Doldurea and Deputy Mayor Ms. Lari P?tran, to discuss prospects for foreign investment. The Mayor highlighted Caracal's strategic advantages, including the availability of a skilled workforce, strong road connectivity through the express road linking to the A1 motorway, proximity to Craiova Airport, and rail freight transport potential. The Ambassador was also taken on a tour of the city's prominent cultural landmarks, including the "Ion Hagiescu Miri?te" Museum of Ethnography and Urban History and the National Theatre. The local administration reiterated its openness to dialogue and cooperation aimed at sustainable development.

The Ambassador also visited the commune of Dobrosloveni, where he was received by Mayor Mr. Gheorghe Tudora?cu and representatives of the local



Ambassador Dr Manoj Kumar Mohapatra and Mayor of Dobrosloveni, Mr. Gheorghe Tudorascu planting a tree at the cultural site Casa Malvei in Romula



Ambassador met Mayor of Dobrosloveni, Mr. Gheorghe Tudorascu

administration. Discussions focused on opportunities for foreign investment and long-term economic cooperation for the sustainable development of the community. A symbolic highlight of the visit was the planting of a tree at the cultural site Casa Malvei in



Ambassador Mohapatra and Mayor of Dobrosloveni, Mr. Gheorghe Tudorascu spoke about future collaboration opportunities for foreign investment and long-term economic cooperation



Discussion with Mayor of Ramnicu Valcea Mr. Mircia Gutau

During interactions with the local community, Ambassador Mohapatra noted the shared cultural values between India and Romania, particularly hospitality, traditional dance, and the joy of sharing meals together, underscoring the strong people-to-people connect between the two cultures. The



Romula, signifying the deepening roots of friendship and cooperation between India and Dobrosloveni, while also promoting the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's campaign "Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam". Further discussions were held at the Dobrosloveni Cultural Center in a warm and friendly atmosphere.

In Râmnicu Vâlcea, Ambassador held a meeting at the City Hall with Mayor Mr. Mircia Gutu. The discussions focused on strengthening collaboration between Indian institutions and entities in Râmnicu Vâlcea in areas such as economic cooperation, investment, education and wellness tourism, and cultural exchanges. The meeting, attended by Deputy Mayors Ms. Carmen Preda and Mr. Eusebiu Ve?eleanu, as well as Public Administrator Ms. Andreea Iordache, took place in a cordial and constructive atmosphere. At the conclusion of the meeting, Ambassador Mohapatra proposed convening a follow-up interaction with Indian business leaders in Bucharest in January 2026, expressing optimism about establishing mutually beneficial partnerships.



Ambassador Mohapatra with Mr. Mircia Gutau, Mayor of Ramnicu Valcea, and others

Ambassador also extended invitations to the Mayors to lead business delegations to India at mutually convenient dates.

The visits reflected India's commitment to strengthening engagement with Romanian local administrations and promoting decentralized cooperation, investment partnerships, and cultural exchanges, thereby further deepening the India-Romania bilateral relationship.

(Based on a press release issued by the Embassy of India in Bucharest)

After Sikh group lawsuit, California delays revocation of 17,000 truckers' licenses

State postpones action until March as US transportation officials warn of a January 5 deadline, potential \$160 million funding loss

**JANUARY 2, 2026
SACRAMENTO (TIP)**

A week after a group of immigrant truckers sued California's Department of Motor Vehicles, California said Tuesday that it will delay revocation of 17,000 commercial driver's licenses until March, giving authorities more time to ensure that truckers and bus drivers who legally qualify for the licenses can retain them.

According to HT, citing an Associated Press report, US Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy said the state could lose \$160 million in federal funding if it fails to meet a January 5 deadline to revoke the license. He has already withheld \$40 million, saying California is not enforcing English proficiency requirements for truck drivers.

California sent notices invalidating the license after pressure from Duffy to ensure that immigrants who are in the country illegally are not granted commercial licenses.

"California does NOT have an 'extension' to keep breaking the law and putting Americans at risk on the roads," Duffy posted on the social platform X.

"Our number one mission is to ensure that every American gets home safely.



Truck drivers of the Sikh faith have been caught in the crossfire and faced harassment because the drivers in the Florida crash and another deadly crash in California this fall were both Sikhs.

Representative image/iStock

We're backing aggressive enforcement and empowering states to keep unqualified, unvetted drivers off the road with over \$118 MILLION in grants. 2026 is the year of safer roads!" he said in another post.

Concerns about immigrant truck drivers gained attention after a tractor-trailer driver who was not authorized to be in the US made an illegal U-turn and caused an August crash in Florida that killed three people. A fiery California

crash that also killed three people in October and involved a Sikh truck driver in the country illegally added to the worries.

The Sikh Coalition, a national civil rights group, and the San Francisco-based Asian Law Caucus filed a class-action lawsuit on behalf of affected California drivers, arguing that immigrant truck drivers were being unfairly targeted.

Immigrants make up about 20% of all truck drivers, while non-domiciled licenses available to immigrants account for about 5% of all commercial driver's licenses, or roughly 200,000 drivers, the report said.

Munmeeth Kaur, legal director of the Sikh Coalition, said the delay "is an important step towards alleviating the immediate threat that these drivers are facing to their lives and livelihoods."

The federal government had threatened to withhold millions of dollars in funding from California, Pennsylvania, Minnesota and New York after audits found major problems, including licenses remaining valid long after immigrant truck drivers' work permits expired.

FBI says it disrupted a potential New Year's Eve attack inspired by Islamic State group

Christian Sturdivant, 18, was charged with attempting to provide material support to a foreign terror organization after officials say he communicated his attack plans to an undercover FBI employee

**JANUARY 02, 2026
CHARLOTTE, N.C (TIP)**

Associated Press quoted the FBI as saying on Friday, January 2, 2026, that it had disrupted a plot to attack a North Carolina grocery store and fast-food restaurant on New Year's Eve, arresting a man who officials said was inspired by the Islamic State group and had pledged loyalty to the extremist militants.



Christian Sturdivant, 18, was charged with attempting to provide material support to a foreign terror organization after officials say he communicated his attack plans to an undercover FBI employee who was posing as an encouraging confidant. He was arrested by federal agents on Wednesday (December 31, 2025). He remained held following a Friday morning court appearance. Another hearing is set for Jan. 7.

The FBI has foiled several alleged attacks through sting operations in which agents posed as terror supporters, supplying advice and equipment.

(Read full story at
www.theindianpanorama.news)

Round Rock Mayor Honors Mohammed Kashif at Launch of Free IT Bootcamp 2025



Honorable Mayor of Round Rock, Texas, Mr. Craig Morgan honored and recognized Mohammed Kashif, for his outstanding hard work, dedication, and commitment to serving the Round Rock community.

**DECEMBER 21, 2025
DALLAS, TX (TIP)**

The launch of the Free IT Bootcamp 2025 at the Round Rock Public Library marked a significant milestone for the city's ongoing efforts toward digital inclusion and workforce development. The inaugural event witnessed strong participation from the community, including youth, students, early-career professionals, and working adults seeking to build or transition into careers in information technology.

A major highlight of the event was the presence of the Honorable Mayor of Round Rock, Texas, Mr. Craig Morgan, who formally inaugurated the program and publicly honored and recognized the organizer, Mohammed Kashif, for his outstanding hard work, dedication, and commitment to serving the Round Rock community.

While addressing the gathering, Mayor Morgan applauded Kashif's vision and initiative, emphasizing that the free and open-to-the-public IT Bootcamp 2025 will play a vital role in

equipping individuals with essential computer and IT skills needed to secure employment. He further noted that the program would help participants enhance their existing technical capabilities through structured mentoring, ranging from basic computer skills to advanced IT concepts.

The Free IT Bootcamp 2025 has been thoughtfully designed to bridge the gap between academic learning and real-world industry requirements. Many students and early-career professionals, despite possessing strong theoretical knowledge, often face difficulties in job interviews due to limited practical exposure. At the same time, individuals from non-IT and blue-collar backgrounds who aspire to enter the technology sector frequently encounter financial constraints and a lack of access to proper guidance.

To address these challenges, Mohammed Kashif conceptualized the Free IT Bootcamp as a community-driven initiative focused on practical, industry-relevant training at no cost. The program covers a comprehensive range of IT fundamentals, including programming, databases, cybersecurity, cloud technologies, career readiness, and mentoring sessions aimed at building confidence and employability.

The Mayor's public recognition of Kashif was met with warm appreciation from attendees, many of whom have registered to participate in the upcoming bootcamp sessions. Community members described the initiative as timely and impactful, highlighting its role in democratizing access to technology education and creating meaningful pathways to employment.

With strong community support and the endorsement of city leadership, the Free IT Bootcamp 2025 is set to become a transformative platform for Round Rock-empowering individuals with digital skills, professional guidance, and new opportunities in an increasingly technology-driven economy.

(Murtaza Ali Khan is Critic | Curator | Journalist | Historian. An award-winning journalist, he has been covering art, culture, music, and entertainment for a decade and a half. He can be reached at murtaza.jmi@gmail.com / Phone: +91 9717554334)

**MURTAZA
ALI KHAN**



NJPAC CONTINUES TO 'STAND IN SOLIDARITY' WITH THE COMMUNITY IN 2026

BY MABEL PAIS

The topic of affordable housing is back in 2026 by popular demand from participants in last year's 'Standing in Solidarity' season.

In 2024, new legislation was introduced that requires every town in New Jersey to build its fair share of low-income housing. But what does this mean for families — will they find a warm welcome, and viable housing options, in every municipality? Or might local politics in some towns potentially stymie the building of affordable homes?

The evening includes a screening of the PSEG Social Impact film 'City Rising: Gentrification and Displacement,' a PBS documentary series exploring the impact of discriminatory laws on the country's housing crisis.



A Roof Over Every Head. -Credit: njpac.org

PROGRAM OPENING POEM

In partnership with Dodge Poetry, the program will open with a poem by Mia X, the City of Newark's inaugural Poet Laureate.

PANELISTS & MODERATOR

MODERATOR

AMOL SINHA

Executive Director at ACLU of New Jersey and curator of the program.

PANELISTS

Adam Gordon, Executive Director, Fair Share Housing Center

Samra Haider, President and CEO, Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation

Taiisa Kelly, CEO, Monarch Housing

Associates

DaWuan Norwood, Policy Counsel, ACLU of New Jersey

Amber Randolph, Associate Vice President, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

SCHEDULE

WHAT: A ROOF OVER EVERY HEAD: AFFORDABLE HOUSING CRISIS Resource Tables, Film Screening & Panel Conversation

WHEN: Jan 27

Resource Tables available at 5 PM

Film at 6 PM,

Panel Conversation at 7 PM

WHERE: NJPAC's Chase Room, 2nd Floor

RSVP : RSVP, required, @njpac.org/event/a-roof-over-every-head-affordable-housing-crisis-part-ii/#register

LOOK NO FURTHER THAN MANTENA GLOBAL CARE FOR FAMILY FUN

BY MABEL PAIS

Look no further than Mantena Global Care (mantenaglobalcare.org/en/quem-somos) and NJPAC Community Engagement for entertaining (and free) activities to enjoy with your family. Mantena's monthly programs educate and nurture the creativity of participants of all ages. Activities range from dance and crafts to storytelling, painting and percussion. Mantena can't wait to have fun with you!

All of the activities take place at Mantena Global Care located at 294 Ferry Street in Newark, NJ.

ACTIVITIES - UPCOMING

JANUARY 17, 2026

KIDS IN MOVEMENT

11:30 AM to 12:30 PM

Activities include:

Dance and Movement

Focus: motor development and coordination

RSVP @

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JANUARY 31, 2026

11:30 AM to 12:00 PM

An engaging musical experience for rhythm, coordination, and fun!

RSVP @

https://formstack.io/_wdlMrbzMDtkat_oapnuBR94r99mSt8M8dGgJOKHtHm_OUMLVc1lNYqfcz-m2ym3b16cNCiPlx85dp4ijnvHQ

Mantena Global Care offers various services that facilitate integration with American society, stimulating a sense of community and promoting the appreciation of native and local culture. Focusing on the areas of health, education, community and cultural services, and through the support of volunteers and donors. Mantena Global Care plans to expand its programs to accommodate growing demand.



Collage of activities organized by Mantena Global Care. - Credit: www.mantenaglobalcare.org

SERVICES OFFERED

HEALTH

- SAVE Program UMDNJ – Workshop on cancer prevention in partnership with the University of Medicine and Dentistry [now Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences (RBHS)]
- Making Strides – workshop and support group for cancer survivors
- Male cancer prevention assistance program
- HIV, cholesterol and diabetes prevention test
- CPR and first aid training
- Blood donation in partnership with the American Red Cross

- Registration of bone marrow donors in partnership with the Icla da Silva Foundation
- Readings and information about healthy eating

EDUCATION

- English classes
- Portuguese classes
- Computing classes
- Craft classes
- Painting classes
- Classes for taking the citizenship test
- Technical and professional courses
- Distance undergraduate and graduate courses in partnership with IPETT
- Preparation courses for the virtual

supplementary supplement in partnership with IBESI

- Online professional courses in partnership with Instituto Monitor and IBDI (Brazilian Institute of Interior Design)

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

- Personalized service for children with special needs
- Food Stamp registration in partnership with "Community Food Bank of New Jersey"
- GAEP – Educational and Psychological Support Group – Counseling with mental health and parent education professionals about the New Jersey state education system.
- Legal assistance
- Collection of donations
- Itinerant Brazilian Consulate
- Support Commission for Deported Immigrants
- Course on safety at work offered by OSHA (Occupational Health and Safety Administration)

CULTURE

- Children's orchestra (music class)
- Cultural trips
- Art exposition
- Book launch
- Brazilian Library
- Art Fair
- Cultural celebration and Brazilian festivities (music, dance, art and typical foods)

MANTENA GLOBAL CARE

The Newark Community Needs Your Help.

Mantena is a non-profit organization operating here in the United States in Newark, NJ, helping people in need within the community.

Be part of this force, be a volunteer!

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

A global salute to the Tenth Guru: Guru Gobind Singh's Birth Anniversary in 2025

Guru Gobind Singh Ji, the tenth Sikh Guru, occupies a unique and exalted place in world history as a spiritual master, warrior-poet and social reformer. Born in 1666 at Patna Sahib, he reshaped the moral and spiritual consciousness of his time by founding the Khalsa Panth in 1699 and by articulating a vision of fearless devotion, equality and righteous resistance to injustice. His birth anniversary, known as Prakash Parv or Guru Gobind Singh Jayanti, is therefore observed not only as a religious festival but as a global reaffirmation of ethical courage and human dignity. In 2025, the anniversary was commemorated across continents, uniting Sikh communities in India and the diaspora in a shared expression of faith and service.

India: The Heartland of Devotion and Remembrance

In India, where the physical and spiritual landmarks of Guru Gobind Singh Ji's life are deeply embedded, the birth anniversary was marked with profound devotion and large-scale participation. Major gurdwaras across Punjab, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi became centres of continuous prayer and reflection. The Golden Temple in Amritsar witnessed an unbroken flow of devotees who gathered for Akhand Paaths, kirtans and special ardaas, while langars served thousands without distinction, reflecting the Guru's uncompromising belief in equality.

At Takht Sri Harmandir Sahib in Patna, the Guru's birthplace, the Prakash Parv unfolded as a multi-day spiritual celebration. Prabhat pheris echoed through the city streets in the days leading up to the main observance, building an atmosphere of reverence and anticipation. On the day of the anniversary, Nagar Kirtans led by the Panj Pyaras moved through Patna, accompanied by Gatka performances that symbolised the martial and spiritual synthesis central to the Guru's teachings. Religious congregations, historical narrations and community service activities continued throughout the day, reinforcing Patna Sahib's enduring significance in Sikh memory.

Canada: Faith, Identity and Multicultural Harmony

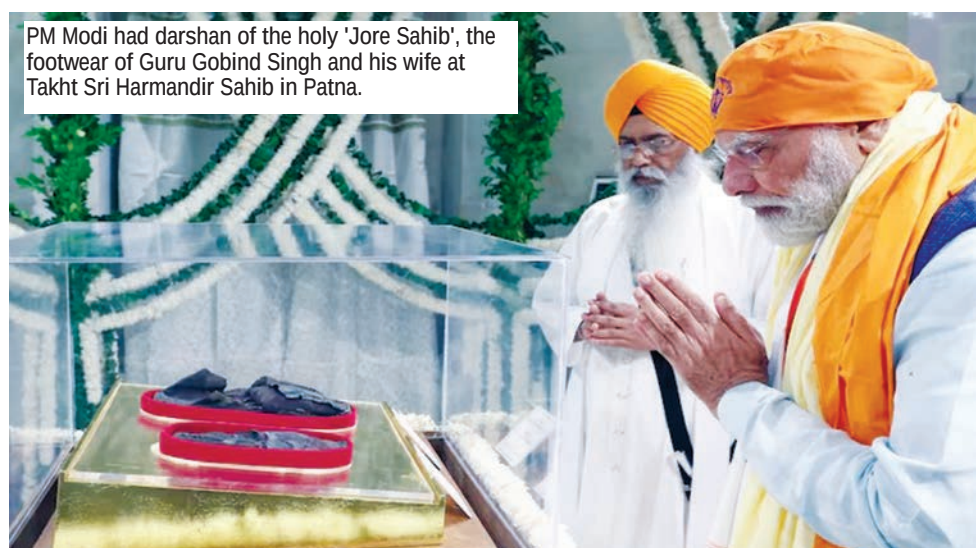
In Canada, home to one of the world's largest Sikh diasporas, Guru Gobind Singh Jayanti in 2025 was celebrated with deep devotion and visible cultural pride. Major gurdwaras in Ontario, particularly in Mississauga, Brampton and Toronto, organised extended Akhand Paaths, kirtan samagams and spiritual discourses that drew large congregations. Families gathered in significant numbers, and Sikh youth played a central role in organising programmes, performing devotional music and participating in Gatka



A Sikh priest carrying the Guru Granth Sahib during a religious procession on the birth anniversary of Guru Gobind Singh at the Golden Temple in Amritsar.



Nagar Kirtan in Winnipeg



PM Modi had darshan of the holy 'Jore Sahib', the footwear of Guru Gobind Singh and his wife at Takht Sri Harmandir Sahib in Patna.

demonstrations.

Nagar Kirtans in several Canadian cities transformed public spaces into vibrant expressions of Sikh faith, with processions moving through neighbourhoods accompanied by hymns and community kitchens offering langar to all. These celebrations reflected the integration of Sikh religious life within Canada's multicultural ethos, where public observance of faith is both accepted and encouraged.

United States: Devotion, Education and Community Outreach

Across the United States, Sikh communities marked Guru Gobind Singh Ji's birth anniversary through prayer, education and service. Prominent gurdwaras in New York, New Jersey, California and Texas held day-long religious congregations featuring Gurbani recitation, kirtan and discourses on the Guru's role as the founder of the Khalsa Panth. Special

emphasis was placed on educating younger generations about Sikh history, the Guru's poetry and his vision of a disciplined yet compassionate community.

Youth organisations across American cities organised Gatka displays, storytelling sessions and seva activities, reinforcing the Guru's teachings through lived practice. In several locations, interfaith guests and civic representatives joined the observances, highlighting the universal appeal of Guru Gobind Singh Ji's message of standing up for truth and defending human dignity.

Australia: A Growing Community and Living Tradition

In Australia, where the Sikh population has grown steadily over recent decades, Guru Gobind Singh Jayanti in 2025 was observed with devotion and quiet grandeur. Gurdwaras in Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide and other cities organised Akhand Paaths, kirtan programmes and langar services in accordance with the Sikh calendar. Though smaller in scale compared to India or Canada, these gatherings reflected a strong sense of spiritual continuity and communal belonging.

Community leaders used the occasion to reflect on the Guru's relevance in modern multicultural societies, emphasising his teachings on courage, equality and ethical responsibility. The celebrations also served as moments of cultural visibility, strengthening understanding between Sikh Australians and the wider society.

Shared Themes Across Continents

Across India, Canada, the United States and Australia, the 2025 observances were united by common themes. Devotional practices such as Akhand Paath and kirtan formed the spiritual core of the celebrations, while langar remained a powerful symbol of equality and collective service. Gatka performances and youth participation highlighted the dynamic transmission of Sikh tradition across generations, while interfaith and civic engagement underscored the universal relevance of the Guru's ideals.

A Legacy That Transcends Borders

Guru Gobind Singh Ji's birth anniversary in 2025 emerged as a truly global moment of remembrance and renewal. From the sanctified precincts of the Golden Temple and Patna Sahib to the gurdwaras of Toronto, New York and Melbourne, the celebrations reaffirmed a shared spiritual heritage rooted in courage, compassion and justice. More than three centuries after his birth, the Tenth Guru continues to inspire millions worldwide, reminding humanity that faith, when guided by truth and service, remains a powerful force for unity and moral strength.

Remembering the Young Martyrs: How the Sahibzadas' martyrdom was observed in India and abroad

The martyrdom of the Sahibzadas—Baba Zorawar Singh and Baba Fateh Singh, the younger sons of Guru Gobind Singh Ji—stands as one of the most heart-rending yet inspiring episodes in world history. In December 1705, the two children, aged just nine and seven, were executed at Sirhind for refusing to abandon their faith. Their sacrifice, along with the earlier martyrdom of the elder Sahibzadas, Baba Ajit Singh and Baba Jujhar Singh, has come to symbolise unshakeable faith, moral courage and resistance against tyranny. In India and across the global Sikh diaspora, the remembrance of this supreme sacrifice is observed with deep solemnity, reflection and collective resolve.

In recent years, the observance has acquired renewed national and global visibility through Veer Bal Diwas, commemorated annually on December 26, marking a moment of shared remembrance beyond the Sikh community. In 2025, the martyrdom of the Sahibzadas was remembered with particular intensity in India and abroad, blending traditional Sikh religious practices with broader civic and educational engagement.

India: Sacred Remembrance Rooted in History

In India, the observance of the Sahibzadas' martyrdom is deeply intertwined with sacred geography and collective memory. Key historical sites associated with the events of 1705-06 became centres of prayer and reflection. At Fatehgarh Sahib in Punjab, where Baba Zorawar Singh and Baba Fateh Singh were martyred, thousands of devotees gathered for *shaheedi samagams*, Akhand Paaths and kirtan darbars. The atmosphere was solemn rather than celebratory, with hymns and discourses focusing on sacrifice, steadfastness and faith in the face of cruelty.

Gurdwaras across Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi and Bihar organised special religious congregations, during which the life stories of the Sahibzadas were narrated in detail. Katha and Gurbani recitations emphasised not just the tragedy of their deaths, but the moral clarity and spiritual courage displayed by the young martyrs. Langars were organised as acts of seva, reinforcing the Sikh belief that remembrance must be accompanied by service.

Veer Bal Diwas: National Recognition of Courage

The observance of Veer Bal Diwas on December 26 has added a national dimension to the remembrance of the Sahibzadas. In 2025, schools, cultural institutions and government bodies across India marked the day through commemorative programmes, exhibitions and educational events.



Special assemblies were held in schools, where students learned about the Sahibzadas as symbols of fearlessness, moral strength and youthful heroism.

National and state-level events highlighted the relevance of the Sahibzadas' sacrifice in contemporary society, particularly in the context of standing up for truth and conscience. Speeches and cultural presentations portrayed the Sahibzadas not merely as historical figures, but as role models whose lives challenge modern notions of courage and resilience. Veer Bal Diwas thus functioned as a bridge-bringing a deeply Sikh historical memory into the broader national narrative of sacrifice and ethical courage.

As part of the national observance, Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid heartfelt tribute to the Sahibzadas on Veer Bal Diwas, underscoring the profound moral and historical significance of their sacrifice. Speaking at the national programme in Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi, Modi described Veer Bal Diwas as "a day of reverence, dedicated to remembering the sacrifice of the brave Sahibzades," and highlighted how their courage, conviction and steadfast adherence to righteousness continue to inspire generations across India. He recalled the unshakeable faith of Mata Gujri Ji and the immortal teachings of Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji, and called on the youth to draw strength

from the Sahibzadas' indomitable spirit as they pursue their dreams and responsibilities for the nation's future. Modi observed that the legacy of their bravery not only reflects the Sikh tradition of sacrifice but also embodies values of courage and moral clarity that are vital for all Indians today, affirming that such examples will continue to motivate people for generations to come.

Spiritual Observances and Community Participation

Across India, the martyrdom observances were marked by a distinctive spiritual tone. Unlike festive gurpurabs, these days were characterised by quiet devotion, contemplation and humility. Many gurdwaras observed early-morning prayers, followed by kirtans that dwelt on themes of *chardi kala*—the Sikh principle of remaining spiritually elevated even in suffering. Gatka displays, where organised, were restrained and symbolic, underscoring discipline and readiness rather than spectacle.

Community participation extended beyond religious spaces. Sikh organisations arranged blood donation camps, charity drives and free medical camps in memory of the Sahibzadas, translating remembrance into social responsibility. These acts reflected the Sikh understanding that martyrdom is honoured not by mourning alone, but by

living according to the values for which the martyrs stood.

Canada: Diaspora Remembrance and Youth Engagement

In Canada, the martyrdom of the Sahibzadas was observed with deep emotional resonance, particularly among Sikh youth. Gurdwaras in Ontario and British Columbia held special shaheedi samagams, where kirtan and katha focused on the historical events at Sirhind and the spiritual maturity displayed by the young Sahibzadas. Educational sessions were organised in Punjabi schools and Sikh study circles, ensuring that younger generations born abroad remained connected to this foundational episode of Sikh history.

Veer Bal Diwas was also acknowledged through community-led initiatives, including seminars, storytelling sessions and youth-centric discussions on courage, identity and ethical decision-making. In some cities, Sikh organisations collaborated with local institutions to present the story of the Sahibzadas as a universal lesson in standing firm against injustice, irrespective of age or circumstance.

United States: Faith, Memory and Interfaith Awareness

Across the United States, Sikh communities marked the martyrdom with religious solemnity and outreach. Gurdwaras in New York, New Jersey, California and Texas organised Akhand Paaths and special kirtan programmes dedicated to the Sahibzadas. Religious leaders used the occasion to explain the historical context of Mughal persecution and the Guru's uncompromising stand for religious freedom.

Veer Bal Diwas observances in the U.S. often included interfaith components, with Sikh organisations inviting educators, students and civic representatives to learn about the Sahibzadas' sacrifice. Youth groups played a central role, using presentations, dramatizations and discussions to communicate the message of fearless integrity to wider audiences.

Australia and Other Global Communities

In Australia, where Sikh communities continue to grow, the martyrdom of the Sahibzadas was observed with reverence and educational focus. Gurdwaras in Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide held prayer services and katha sessions, while community leaders emphasised the relevance of the Sahibzadas' sacrifice in nurturing moral strength among children and youth in modern societies.

Similar observances took place in the United Kingdom, Europe and Southeast Asia, where Sikh diaspora communities used the occasion to reaffirm collective identity and pass on historical memory through oral narration, devotional music and community service.

Rich Tributes paid to the Younger Sahibzadas Zoravar Singh ji and Fateh Singh ji on Veer Bal Divas

DECEMBER 28, 2025
NEW YORK CITY (TIP)

The Consulate General of India on Thursday, December 26, paid rich tributes to the younger Sahibzadas of Guru Gobind Singh-Sahibzada Zorawar Singh and Sahibzada Fateh Singh-who were bricked alive on the orders of the Mughal governor of Sirhind for refusing to renounce their faith and convert to Islam. The solemn commemoration was held as part of Veer Bal Divas, a day declared by the Government of India to honor the extraordinary courage, sacrifice, and moral fortitude of the Sahibzadas.

Continuing its tradition of commemorating the supreme sacrifice of the Sahibzadas through art and culture, the Consulate General of India once again organized a photo exhibition depicting the martyrdom of the Sahibzadas of Guru Gobind Singh as part of the Veer Bal Divas observances this year.



Consul General Binaya Pradhan in conversation with Prof. Indrajit S Saluja at the photo exhibit organized by the Indian Consulate in New York City. Sardar Daler Singh is seen standing with the Consul General. -Photo: Jay Mandal/On Assignment

The exhibition showcased a poignant collection of paintings portraying the courage, steadfast faith, and ultimate sacrifice of the younger Sahibzadas-Sahibzada Zorawar Singh and Sahibzada Fateh Singh-who were bricked alive at Sirhind for refusing to convert to Islam. The artworks, rendered in diverse styles, vividly captured the historical tragedy as well as the timeless values of bravery, sacrifice, and resistance to oppression.

The exhibition drew a steady stream of visitors from the Indian diaspora and the wider community. Among the prominent visitors was the Gatka team led by Sardar Daler Singh, whose presence underscored the living martial and spiritual traditions inspired by Sikh history. Members of the Gatka team spent considerable time viewing



Consul General Binaya Pradhan in conversation with Prof. Indrajit S Saluja at the photo exhibit organized by the Indian Consulate in New York City. Sardar Daler Singh is seen standing with the Consul General. -Photo: Jay Mandal/On Assignment

the artworks and interacting with organizers, appreciating the role of visual art in educating younger generations about the legacy of the Sahibzadas.

Consulate officials noted that exhibitions such as these serve as a powerful medium to connect history with contemporary audiences, especially youth born and raised overseas. "Through paintings, history speaks directly to the heart," an official observed, adding that the annual exhibition has become an integral part of the Consulate's Veer Bal Divas programming.

Visitors described the exhibition as moving and educative, praising the Consulate's effort to blend remembrance with cultural outreach. The exhibition reinforced the message that the sacrifice of the Sahibzadas remains a universal symbol of moral courage, religious freedom, and the triumph of conscience over coercion.

Speaking on the occasion, Consul General of India in New York, Ambassador Binaya Srikanta Pradhan recalled the defining moment in Sikh history when the two young sons of Guru Gobind Singh chose death over submission, standing firm in their beliefs despite severe coercion. "Their martyrdom is not merely a Sikh legacy; it is a universal testament to courage, conscience, and the inviolable right to faith," he said, adding that Veer Bal Divas is observed to inspire younger generations to uphold ethical values and moral courage in the face of injustice.

Consul, Community Affairs, Tsewang Gyaltsen welcomed the visitors to the photo exhibition and answered their questions about the photo exhibits.

Addressing the gathering, a former President of Gurdwara Baba Makhan Shah Lobana in New York, Sardar Daler Singh movingly narrated the inspiring story of the Sahibzadas, highlighting their exceptional courage, unwavering faith, and fearless defiance of oppression despite their tender age. He said the martyrdom of Sahibzada Zorawar Singh and Sahibzada Fateh Singh remains one of the most powerful

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Group photo of the participants with Consul General, Binaya Pradhan, at Veer Baal Divas photo exhibit organized by the Indian Consulate in New York City. -Photo : Jay Mandal/On Assignment

CONTD FROM PAGE 22



Veer Baal Diwas photo exhibit organized at the Indian Consulate in New York City.

-Photo : Jay Mandal/On Assignment

examples of moral strength and spiritual resilience in world history, and continues to inspire generations of Sikhs to stand by truth and righteousness.

A particularly heartening aspect of the event was the enthusiastic participation of young boys and girls who had accompanied Sardar Daler Singh. Several of them

engaged in thoughtful interaction with Prof. Indrajit Singh Saluja, Chief Editor of The Indian Panorama, sharing their understanding of the martyrdom of the Sahibzadas and reflecting on the lessons of bravery, sacrifice, and faith they had drawn from the exhibition and the narrations.

Mamdani vows to "govern as a democratic socialist"

I.S. SALUJA
JANUARY 1, 2026
NEW YORK CITY (TIP)

Zohran Mamdani was formally sworn in as New York City's 112th Mayor in a private ceremony held just moments into the New Year in an old subway station here. The 34-year-old Indian-descent Queens state assemblyman became the first South Asian and Muslim elected to helm the largest city in the US. Mamdani was sworn in at the old City Hall subway station at

a private ceremony attended only by his family and close advisers, held around the stroke of midnight as the city ushered in the New Year.

He was sworn in on a Quran as the city's 112th mayor - and its second-youngest - by state Attorney General Letitia James on Thursday, January 1 morning below City Hall Park in a grand, abandoned old subway stop with his wife, artist Rama Duwaji, by his side.

stamped medallion filled with a floral composition, suggest it was produced in Ottoman Syria in the 19th century," it said.

After working part of the night in his new office, Mamdani returned to City Hall in a taxicab around midday Thursday, January 1, for a grander public inauguration where US Sen Bernie Sanders, one of the mayor's political heroes, administered the oath for a second time. "Beginning today, we will govern expansively and audaciously. We may not always succeed, but never will we be accused of lacking the courage to try," Mamdani told a cheering crowd.

"To those who insist that the era of big government is over, hear me when I say this: No longer will City Hall hesitate to use its power to improve New Yorkers' lives," he said.

Thronged turned out in the frigid cold for an inauguration viewing party just south of City Hall on a

Duwaji. Adams was also in attendance, sitting near another former mayor, Bill de Blasio.

Actor Mandy Patinkin, who recently hosted Mamdani to celebrate Hannukah, sang "Over the Rainbow" with children from an elementary school chorus. The invocation was given by Imam Khalid Latif, the director of the Islamic Center of New York City. Poet Cornelius Eady read an original poem called "Proof." In addition to being the city's first Muslim mayor, Mamdani is also its first of South Asian descent and the first to be born in Africa. At 34, Mamdani is also the city's youngest mayor in generations.

Mamdani insisted in his inaugural address that he will not squander his opportunity to implement the policies he promised in his election campaign.

"A moment like this comes rarely. Seldom do we hold such an opportunity to transform and reinvent. Rarer still is it the people themselves whose hands are on the levers of change. And yet we know that too often in our past, moments of great possibility have been promptly surrendered to small imagination and smaller ambition," he said.

In his speech, Mamdani acknowledged the task ahead, saying he knows many will be watching to see whether he can succeed.

"They want to know if the left can govern. They want to know if the struggles that afflict them can be solved. They want to know if it is right to hope again," he said. "So, standing together with the wind of purpose at our backs, we will do something that New Yorkers do better than anyone else: We will set an example for the world."

Mamdani was born in Kampala, Uganda, the son of filmmaker Mira Nair and Mahmood Mamdani, an academic and author. His family moved to New York City when he was 7, with Mamdani growing up in a post-9/11 city where Muslims didn't always feel welcome. He became an American citizen in 2018.

He worked on political campaigns for Democratic candidates in the city before he sought public office himself, winning a state Assembly seat in 2020 to represent a section of Queens.

Now that he has taken office, Mamdani and his wife will depart their one-bedroom, rent stabilized apartment in the outer-borough to take up residence in the stately mayoral residence in Manhattan.

The new mayor inherits a city on the upswing, after years of slow recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Violent crime has dropped to pre-pandemic lows. Tourists are back. Unemployment, which soared during the pandemic years, is also back to pre-COVID levels.

Yet deep concerns remain about high prices and rising rents.

In opening remarks to the crowd, U.S. Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez praised New Yorkers for choosing "courage over fear."

"We have chosen prosperity for the many over spoils for the few," she said.

During the mayoral race, President Donald Trump threatened to withhold federal funding from the city if Mamdani won and mused about sending National Guard troops to the city.

But Trump surprised supporters and foes alike by inviting the Democrat to the White House for what ended up being a cordial meeting in November.

"I want him to do a great job and will help him do a great job," Trump said.

Still, tensions between the two leaders are almost certain to resurface, given their deep policy disagreements, particularly over immigration.

Several speakers at Thursday's inauguration criticized the Trump administration's move to deport more immigrants and expressed hope that Mamdani's City Hall would be an ally to those the president has targeted.

Mamdani also faces skepticism and opposition from some members of the city's Jewish community over his criticisms of Israel's government.

Still, Mamdani supporters in Thursday's crowd expressed optimism that he'd be a unifying force.

"There are moments where everyone in New York comes together; like when the Mets won the World Series in '86," said Mary Hammann, 64, a musician with the Metropolitan Opera. "This feels like that - just colder." (With inputs from PTI, AP)



On the choice of the old subway station as the venue for his historic swearing-in, the New York Times quoted Mamdani as saying that when the Old City Hall Station first opened in 1904 - one of New York's 28 original subway stations

- "it was a physical monument to a city that dared to be both beautiful and build great things that would transform working people's lives." "That ambition need not be a memory confined only to our past, nor must it be isolated only to the tunnels beneath City Hall: it will be the purpose of the administration fortunate enough to serve New Yorkers from the building above."

The New York Public Library announced on Wednesday that Mamdani will use a Quran from the collections of the Schomburg Centre for Research in Black Culture to take the oath of office at the midnight swearing-in ceremony on New Year's Eve.

"This marks a significant moment in our city's history, and we are deeply honored that Mayor-elect Mamdani has chosen to take the oath of office using one of the Library's Qurans," said Anthony W. Marx, President and CEO of The New York Public Library.

"This specific Quran, which Arturo Schomburg preserved for the knowledge and enjoyment of all New Yorkers, symbolizes a greater story of inclusion, representation, and civic-mindedness."

NYPL termed the selection of the Quran by the incoming administration as highly symbolic, both because of its connection to one of NYC's most groundbreaking scholars and for its simple, functional qualities. "The black and red ink, as well as the small, portable size, indicate this Quran was intended for an ordinary reader and everyday use. Although neither dated nor signed, the Quran's minute naskh script and its binding, featuring a gilt-

stretch of Broadway known as the "Canyon of Heroes," famous for its ticker-tape parades.

Mamdani wasted little time getting to work after the event.

He revoked multiple executive orders issued by the previous administration since September 26, 2024, the date federal authorities announced former mayor Eric Adams had been indicted on corruption charges, which were later dismissed following intervention by the Trump administration.

Then he visited an apartment building in Brooklyn to announce he is revitalizing a city office dedicated to protecting tenants and creating two task forces focused on housing construction.

"I will govern as a democratic socialist"

Throughout the daytime ceremony, Mamdani and other speakers hit on the theme that carried him to victory in the election: Using government power to lift up the millions of people who struggle with the city's high cost of living.

Mamdani peppered his remarks with references to those New Yorkers, citing workers in steel-toed boots, halal cart vendors "whose knees ache from working all day" and cooks "wielding a thousand spices."

"I was elected as a democratic socialist and I will govern as a democratic socialist," Mamdani said. "I will not abandon my principles for fear of being deemed radical."

Before administering the oath, Sanders told the crowd that most of the things Mamdani wants to do - including raising taxes on the rich - aren't radical at all.

"In the richest country in the history of the world, making sure that people can live in affordable housing is not radical," he told the crowd. "It is the right and decent thing to do."

Mamdani was accompanied on stage by his wife, Rama

From Principled Left to Power Without Purpose: The CPM's Crisis in Kerala

GEORGE
ABRAHAM



The people of Kerala have spoken decisively in the recent Panchayat and Municipal elections, delivering a clear rebuke to the corrupt and authoritarian style of governance under Pinarayi Vijayan and his close coterie within the CPM. As one surveys the damage inflicted on a party that was once a credible voice for the poor and the disadvantaged, it is evident how far it has fallen and reduced to an empty shell, stripped of ideological coherence and moral authority.

It is therefore worth revisiting whether the CPM's past misjudgments continue to haunt it today, accelerating its steady decline and pushing the party toward political irrelevance. Once a formidable force in West Bengal since Independence, the CPM governed the state uninterrupted for 34 years. The turning point came during the final phase of its rule, when land acquisition controversy severely undermined its credibility. The violence in Nandigram proved to be a fatal blow, exposing a governance model increasingly associated with intimidation, favoritism, and corruption at both local and state levels.

At the national level, the CPM remained a powerhouse even as the UPA-1 wrested power from the NDA in 2004. Together, the CPI and CPM commanded more than 61 seats in the Lok Sabha. With such significant representation, the Left could have demanded key portfolios in the Manmohan Singh cabinet, strengthening its national influence while delivering transformative projects to its strongholds in West Bengal and Kerala. Instead, the party squandered this historic opportunity by staying on the sidelines and ultimately withdrawing support from the government over the Indo-U.S. Civil Nuclear Agreement, a landmark deal that legitimized India's entry into the global nuclear order.

Prakash Karat, then General Secretary of the CPM, will likely be remembered as one of the principal architects of the party's marginalization in national politics, having presided over decisions that sacrificed strategic influence at the altar of ideological rigidity. His insistence on party discipline culminated in the unfortunate and widely criticized action against a leader of immense stature, the then Speaker of the Lok Sabha, Mr. Somnath Chatterjee, an episode many viewed as a display of political arrogance that further eroded the party's credibility. What we are witnessing today appears to be a continuation of that decline, now unfolding under the stewardship of Pinarayi Vijayan, with the CPM steadily losing its remaining footholds and diminishing its relevance in contemporary Indian politics.

The Pinarayi Vijayan regime is not only eroding the party's legacy as a populist force but is also widely perceived as one of the most corrupt administrations in Kerala's history. It is a striking paradox that a leader who

rose from modest beginnings is now seen as embracing luxury and fostering a culture of nepotism. Power is widely believed to be heavily centralized in the Chief Minister's Office, with cabinet ministers and party functionaries frequently sidelined, thereby weakening collective decision-making. Critics further argue that transparency and accountability have been severely compromised, and that dissent or questioning of authority is met with little tolerance, marking a sharp departure from the Left's traditional democratic ethos.

Over time, a series of controversies have significantly dented the public image of the Pinarayi Vijayan administration. The gold smuggling case, which involved individuals with alleged links to the Chief Minister's



Kerala Niyamasabha (Assembly)

-Photo for representational purposes only

Office, raised serious questions about oversight and accountability. The LIFE Mission controversy further called attention to possible procedural violations, while irregularities in cooperative banks-allegedly involving party cadres-have reinforced perceptions of entrenched corruption within the system.

Adding to these concerns, T. Veena, the Chief Minister's daughter, has been named in an ongoing corporate fraud case linked to Cochin Minerals and Rutile Limited (CMRL). The Serious Fraud Investigation Office (SFIO) has alleged that Veena and her firm, Exalogic Solutions, received approximately ₹2.7 crore from CMRL without providing corresponding services, amounting to alleged fraudulent payments under the Companies Act. The Enforcement Directorate has also reportedly registered a case under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) in connection with these transactions. These matters remain under investigation.

Equally troubling for the people of Kerala is what critics describe as economic mismanagement by the current government. Rising public debt and increasing dependence on borrowing point to a growing fiscal

strain. The administration is accused of showing limited regard for fiscal discipline and offering little clarity on sustainable revenue generation. Despite repeated announcements of memoranda of understanding (MoUs), private investment, outside the consumer sector, has remained limited, resulting in inadequate job creation and continued migration of young Keralites in search of better opportunities elsewhere.

Over the years, the CPM has been the principal nemesis of the BJP in Kerala, with youth cadres from both sides frequently engaging in violent clashes that have tragically resulted in loss of life. The CPM also positioned itself as the foremost proponent and defender of secularism, often castigating the Congress for what it perceived as ideological laxity. CPM leaders

communal poison into a state long known for its social harmony. Reports of closed-door meetings between CPM and BJP leaders have further fueled these suspicions. There is widespread speculation that vote transfers or tacit understandings may emerge in the upcoming Assembly elections, serving the interests of both parties. Similar patterns have been observed in West Bengal, where historical accounts from local and panchayat elections describe tactical cooperation between BJP and CPM workers at the grassroots level to counter the Trinamool Congress.

Until now, BJP's failure to gain a strong foothold in Kerala has largely been due to a vigilant electorate that instinctively shifts support between the UDF and the LDF whenever communal politics appears to gain ground. This delicate voter equilibrium, however, is being severely undermined by the CPM's alleged attempts to protect the private interests of the Vijayan family.

Pinarayi Vijayan and the present CPM leadership have strayed far from the values and principles upheld by stalwarts such as E. M. S. Namboothiripad and A. K. Gopalan, leaders who dedicated their lives selflessly to the upliftment of the poor and the marginalized without seeking personal gain. While I am not an admirer of communist philosophy, I have always respected those leaders for their idealism, personal sacrifice, and moral integrity, which deserve universal admiration. Pinarayi Vijayan, however, has rewritten that script, sacrificing ideological purity for personal and political survival, pushing the party toward irrelevance and plunging the state into deep uncertainty.

The CPM today stands at a crossroads. Socialism in its classical form has failed across much of the world, and in Kerala the party appears increasingly devoid of a coherent political philosophy. Instead, it seems intent on perpetuating power through policies that erode the state's financial stability, disturb social peace, and foster opportunistic alliances with communal forces for short-term gains, often accompanied by reckless populism and vote-oriented freebies.

The verdict delivered by the people of Kerala in recent local body elections is not merely an electoral setback; it is a moral indictment. The people of Kerala are no longer blind to these ploys. History offers the CPM a sobering lesson. In West Bengal, prolonged rule bred arrogance, intolerance of dissent, and ultimately collapse. In national politics, ideological inflexibility squandered historic opportunities and hastened marginalization. Kerala now stands at a similar inflection point. The persistence of alleged compromises, whether ideological, ethical, or tactical, threatens not only the party's future but also the delicate secular and social fabric of the state.

(George Abraham is a former chief technology officer, United Nations. He is Vice-Chair of IOCUSA. He can be reached at gta777@gmail.com)

routinely and vociferously criticized the BJP's policies and its Hindutva-driven politics.

However, what has unfolded during the Pinarayi Vijayan regime has given rise to troubling accusations and narratives suggesting informal or tactical understandings, and even collaboration between the CPM and the BJP. Despite multiple corruption allegations involving Pinarayi Vijayan and his family, the BJP has adopted a noticeably soft approach, raising serious questions among political observers. Even the long-pending Lavalin case involving Pinarayi Vijayan has been deferred repeatedly, not at the behest of the defense but reportedly at the request of the prosecution. These developments prompt an uncomfortable question: whether knowingly or otherwise, the CPM has aligned itself with the BJP's broader objective of creating a Congress-mukt Bharat.

Such short-sightedness is deeply concerning. History shows that the BJP has consistently absorbed or marginalized its partners once it secures a foothold. A compromised and vulnerable Pinarayi Vijayan thus becomes a liability for Kerala, a complacent collaborator who risks opening the door for the BJP to inject

Air India pilot removed from plane under influence of alcohol; Canada seeks investigation

Canada's transport regulator has asked Air India to investigate an incident of a pilot who was removed from a plane before it was due to take off and found to be under the influence of alcohol, a person familiar with the matter said.

Two breathalyser tests conducted by Canadian police at Vancouver International Airport showed the pilot was unfit for duty, the person said on Friday. The incident was labelled as a "serious matter" by Transport Canada in a letter to Air India and authorities are likely to pursue enforcement action, the person added.

The person requested anonymity as they were not authorised to speak to the media. In a statement on Saturday, Transport Canada said it would engage with Air India and India's aviation regulator to ensure "appropriate follow-up actions" are taken.

In a statement, Air India said the flight from Vancouver to Delhi on December 23 experienced a last-minute delay due to the incident, adding that an alternate pilot was brought in to operate the flight. The airline said Canadian authorities raised concerns about the pilot's fitness for duty but did not provide details. "The pilot has been taken off flying duties during the process of enquiry. Air India maintains a zero-tolerance policy towards any violation of applicable rules and regulations," Air India said.

"Pending the outcome of the investigation, any confirmed violation will attract strict disciplinary action in line with company policy."

NEW DELHI (TIP)

The ministry of electronics and information technology (MeitY) has approved 22 new proposals under the third tranche of the Electronics Components Manufacturing Scheme (ECMS), involving a projected investment of Rs 41,863 crore, according to a note shared with select media on Thursday. This takes the total approved projects to 46.

Earlier, the ministry had approved seven projects worth Rs 5,532 crore in the first tranche on October 27, followed by 17 projects worth Rs 7,172 crore in the second tranche on November 17.

"In continuation to the approvals of 24 applications for an investment of Rs 12,704 crore announced earlier, MeitY has further approved 22 proposals under the ECMS," the background note said.

The 22 projects approved in the third tranche are expected to generate production worth Rs 2,58,152 crore and create 33,791 direct jobs. This is more than double the combined production value of Rs 1,09,517 crore projected from the first

MP CM fires top officials after 10 dead, Uma Bharti calls for 'repentance'

INDORE (TIP)

The water crisis in Indore's Bhagirathpura area has claimed at least 10 lives, while more than 1,400 people have been affected by vomiting and diarrhoea, officials said, as contaminated drinking water triggered a major public health crisis in Madhya Pradesh.

Amid the outrage and opposition's attack, Madhya Pradesh chief minister Mohan Yadav said he had ordered strict action against erring civic officials and the Additional Commissioner from Indore and Superintending Engineer in-charge.

In a post on X, he wrote, "...I issued directions to the Indore Municipal Corporation Commissioner and Additional Commissioner to issue a show-cause notice in this regard, to immediately remove the Additional Commissioner from Indore, and to relieve the In-Charge Superintending Engineer of the charge of the Water Distribution Works Department. I also issued directions to immediately fill the necessary positions in the Indore Municipal Corporation with effect from now."

Chief Medical and Health Officer (CMHO) of Indore, Madhav Prasad Hasani, said senior doctors and district administration officials were closely monitoring the situation to ensure proper treatment of affected patients.

"Currently, senior doctors and district administration officials are continuously monitoring the situation at the hospitals and keeping a check that proper treatment is being ensured to the patients. I am going for the hearing of a case regarding this contaminated water issue and give further details later. Till now, as per records, four deaths occurred though we will revise and update if we received additional data and evidence in this regard," Hasani told ANI.

Earlier, HT had reported that preliminary findings of an inquiry into the deaths of at least nine people in Bhagirathpura confirmed the presence of bacteria typically found in sewage in drinking water samples, three days after residents were first hospitalised with symptoms of vomiting and diarrhoea.

Cabinet Minister and Indore-1 MLA Kailash Vijayvargiya described the incident as "unfortunate" and said the number of patients admitted to hospitals had fluctuated. "It was increasing yesterday [Tuesday] but has reduced today," he



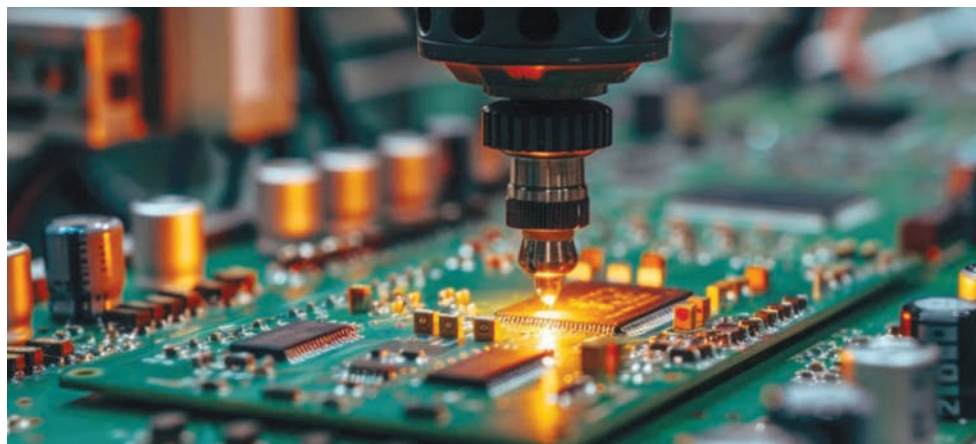
Officials revealed that a detected leakage in the main water supply pipeline, combined with the improperly constructed toilet, created conditions for sewage to contaminate the drinking water supply.

said. While Vijayvargiya remained stationed in the affected locality, Chief Minister Mohan Yadav visited several hospitals to meet patients undergoing treatment.

IMC Commissioner Dileep Yadav told The Hindu that the suspended and dismissed officials failed to identify leakages in time. "A main leakage from a toilet drainage over the main supply line has been repaired and the toilet has been dismantled. Various other leakages were also found and repaired. We will test the water supply tomorrow and check for any leakages and water quality. The supply will be resumed once everything is fine," Mr. Yadav said. He added that more than 100 water tankers had been deployed to meet residents' immediate needs.

Meanwhile, the Madhya Pradesh High Court issued notices to the State authorities and sought a status report on the matter by January 2. Hearing two petitions, the court also directed that patients be provided treatment free of cost after a Bhagirathpura resident alleged that private hospitals were refusing care without payment. Advocate Abhinav Dhanodkar, appearing for the petitioner, said: "We have also requested the court to form a probe committee headed by a retired High Court judge to ensure such incidents are not repeated."

Govt clears 22 E-projects, eyes Apple manufacturing boost



two tranches. The ECMS, notified in April 2025 with a budget outlay of Rs 22,919 crore for six years, received a strong response from both domestic and global investors, with 249 applications proposing total investments of Rs 1.15 lakh crore,

projected production worth Rs 10.34 lakh crore, and potential employment generation for 1.42 lakh people, according to MeitY data from early October.

According to the media note, the latest approvals cover manufacturing across 11

different product segments that are used in mobile phones, telecom equipment, consumer electronics, automobiles, IT hardware and strategic electronics.

Approved products include five bare components like PCB, capacitors, connectors, enclosures and Li-ion cell, along with three sub-assemblies like camera module, display module and optical transceiver, and three supply chain items like aluminium extrusion, anode material and laminate.

The projects will be set up across eight states, namely Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. The approvals are aimed at "reinforcing the Government's focus on geographically balanced industrial growth and expansion of electronics manufacturing across the country."

Over 12 Naxalites gunned down in encounters in Chhattisgarh's Bastar region

More than 12 Naxalites were killed in separate encounters with the security forces in Chhattisgarh's Bastar region on Saturday, Jan 3, police said.

More than 10 ultras were gunned down in Sukma, while two were eliminated in the adjoining Bijapur district in the early hours of the day, they said.

An exchange of fire broke out in the forest of the southern region of Sukma district, where a team of security personnel was out on an anti-Naxalite operation, a senior police official said.

"More than 10 cadres have been neutralised so far. The operation is still underway, and more details will be shared later," he said.

In Bijapur, a gunfight took place in a forest in the southern region of the district when a team of the District Reserve Guard, a unit of the state police, was out on a similar operation around 5 am, another official said.

The bodies of two Naxalites were recovered from the scene, he said.

The intermittent exchange of fire was still underway, and further details were awaited, the official said.

As many as 285 Naxalites were gunned down in separate encounters with security forces in Chhattisgarh last year.

Degree in hand, RDX in pocket: Rajnath flags white-collar terror threat

UDAIPUR (TIP)

Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Friday flagged what he described as a disturbing rise of "white-collar terrorism" in the country, warning that higher education without values can turn dangerous for society.

Speaking at the 104th foundation day of Bhupal Nobles' University, Singh cited the November 10 car bomb blast near Delhi's Red Fort to underline his point. He noted that the accused in the attack were qualified doctors, calling it a stark example of how education alone does not guarantee ethical conduct.

"Today, an alarming trend of white-collar terrorism is emerging in the country. Highly-educated people are working against society and the country. The perpetrators of the (Delhi) bomb blast were doctors – those who had degree in hand and RDX in their pockets. This highlights the need for knowledge to be accompanied by values and character," he said.

The explosion involved an explosives-laden i20 car driven by Dr Umar-un-Nabi and resulted in the deaths of 15 people. Officials later uncovered a white-collar terror module, leading to the arrest of three doctors -- Muzammil Ganai, Adeel Rather and Shaheena Saeed -- among others.

"The purpose of education is not only professional success but also the development of morality, ethics and human character. Any education system



that cannot fulfil this objective, which does not impart humility, a sense of character and 'dharma' (righteousness) along with knowledge, is incomplete," the Defence Minister said.

Singh said terrorists are not necessarily illiterate and can hold university degrees, but often lack wisdom and values.

"When I talk about religion, it should not be associated with going to the temple, mosque or church for prayer. Religion is a sense of duty. Education devoid of religion and morality will not be useful to society, and sometimes it can even prove fatal. This is why educated people are sometimes found to be involved in crimes," he added.

Singh also spoke about India's economic and technological trajectory, saying the country is currently the world's fourth-largest economy and is on course to become the third-largest by 2030. Universities, he said, have a critical

role to play in this journey.

'India to become fully self-reliant in weapons in next 15-20 years'

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Friday said that over the next 15-20 years, India will become fully self-reliant in weapons.

Defence Minister praised the growing trend of startups in the defence sector.

"Today, many startups in the defence sector are doing remarkable work. Whatever our startups are building is close to the ground reality and also meets the global standards," he said.

Rajnath Singh said that society has to remain informed about evolving innovations, which can help in country's progress. Defence Minister also said that, "India has risen from 76th place in 2014 to 39th place in 2024 in the Global Innovation Index. The digital economy's contribution to national income has also increased. Today, India has become the world's third-largest startup ecosystem. Through public use of changing technology, we can give a new direction to India's progress. We must stay continuously informed about rapidly evolving innovations. Today, the shortage is not of knowledge, data, or information, but of wisdom. Terrorists are not illiterate; they, too, have high degrees, but they lack wisdom. When there is knowledge without discernment, a person works in ways that are divisive for society," he said.

'Understanding Sangh by looking at BJP is a huge mistake': RSS chief

NEW DELHI (TIP)

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat said on Friday, January 2, that trying to understand the Sangh by looking at the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) would be a "huge mistake", as the RSS is a unique organisation and was not born as a "reaction or opposition" to anything.

Bhagwat was speaking at a gathering in Bhopal as part of the Sangh's centenary-related activities being held across the country.

RSS cannot be understood by looking at BJP: Mohan Bhagwat

During the gathering, he said the RSS is not a paramilitary organisation and that it would be a mistake to view it through the lens of the BJP.

Notably, the RSS is generally considered the parent organisation of the Jana Sangh and its successor, the BJP.

"If you want to understand the Sangh by looking at the BJP, it will be a huge mistake. The same mistake will happen

if you try to understand it by looking at Vidya Bharti (an RSS-affiliated organisation)," he was quoted as saying by news agency PTL.

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh works to bring society together and instil values and discipline to ensure that India does not once again fall under foreign domination, he said.

"We wear a uniform, take out marches and do stick exercises. But if someone thinks it is a paramilitary organisation, it will be a mistake," he said, adding that the Sangh is a unique body.

Bhagwat also said that a "false narrative" was being created about the RSS. "Nowadays, people do not go deep to gather the right information. They do not go to the origin. They go to Wikipedia. Everything is not true there. Those who go to reliable sources will get to know about the Sangh," he said.

Because of these misunderstandings, it had become important to explain the RSS' role and purpose, Bhagwat said, referring to his visits across the country

during the Sangh's centenary year.

"There is a common feeling that the Sangh was born as a reaction or opposition to the prevailing forces. This is not the case. The Sangh is not a reaction or opposition to anything. The Sangh is not competing with anyone either," the RSS chief said.

Bhagwat on Swadeshi goods

He also advocated the use of Swadeshi products and said that to "become 'Atmanirbhar' (self-reliant), you need to have Atma Gaurav (self-pride)".

"Only buy and use what is made in your land and which provides employment to people of your country. However, being Swadeshi does not mean that you cut trade with the world. Import only essentials such as medicines that are not produced in India," he said.

The RSS chief added that trade should never be carried out under pressure or fear of tariffs, and should take place only on India's own terms.

HC GRANTS BAIL TO FORMER CM BAGHEL'S SON IN EXCISE CASES

The Chhattisgarh High Court on Friday, Jan 2, granted bail to Chaitanya Baghel, son of former chief minister and senior Congress leader Bhupesh Baghel, in two cases related to the alleged liquor scam.

The high court granted him bail in a case lodged by the Enforcement Directorate and another by Chhattisgarh Anti Corruption Bureau/Economic Offence Wing, ED counsel Saurabh Kumar Pande said.

ED arrested Chaitanya Baghel in July last year in connection with its money laundering probe in the alleged scam, while ACB/EOW placed him under arrest, while he was in jail, in September in its case linked to the corruption probe.

The liquor "scam" in the state, according to ED, was orchestrated between 2019 and 2022 when Chhattisgarh was governed by the Bhupesh Baghel-led Congress government.

India in history this Week

JANUARY 2 TO JANUARY 8

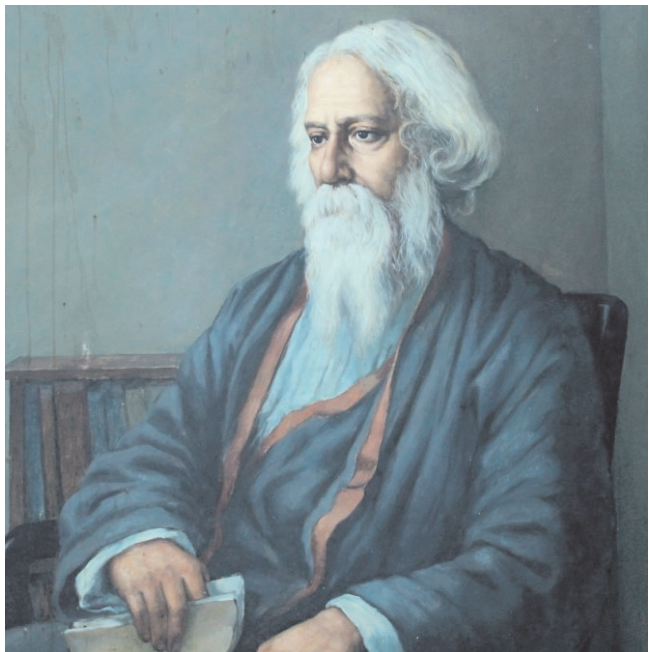
02 JANUARY



1978 Air India Boeing 747 crash. All 213 people aboard this plane were killed.

1757 British troops captured the city of Calcutta (now Kolkata) in India.

03 JANUARY



1894 Ravindra Nath Tagore inaugurated the 'Pausha Mela' at Shanti Niketan.

2009 Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot won the trust vote in the Vidhan Sabha.

2005 USA announces Rs 6.2 crore assistance to provide clean drinking water to tsunami victims in Tamil Nadu.



2000 Calcutta was officially named Kolkata.

1995 360 people died in a fierce fire in a school in Dabwali, Haryana.

1968 Launch of 'Maneka', the country's first meteorological rocket.

1943 For the first time, information about missing people was broadcast on television.

1929 Mahatma Gandhi met Lord Irwin.

1901 Brahmacharya Ashram opened in Shanti Niketan.

1998 Bangladesh refused to hand over India to ULFA general secretary Anoop Chetia.

04 JANUARY



1994 Rahul Dev Burman (RD Burman) famous music composer of Hindi films passed away.

1972 Institute of Criminology and Forensic Science inaugurated in New Delhi.

1966 India-Pakistan Conference between Prime Minister of India Lal Bahadur Shastri and General Ayub Khan of Pakistan begins.

1966 Indo-Pak talks between Prime Minister of India Lal Bahadur Shastri and President of Pakistan General Ayub Khan in Tashkent.

05 JANUARY



2014 Indian communication satellite GSAT-14 was successfully placed into orbit.



2009 Omar Abdullah, President of National

Conference, sworn in as Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir.

2006 India and Nepal extend the duration of the transit treaty by 3 months.

1957 Central Sales Tax Act comes into effect.



1955 Birth of West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in Calcutta (now Kolkata).

1941 Birth of cricketer Mansoor Ali Khan Pataudi in Bhopal.

1934 Birth of Bharatiya Janata Party leader Murli Manohar Joshi.

1890 Advocate Gyanendra Mohan Tagore died.

1671 Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj captured the Salhar region from the Mughals.

1659 Aurangzeb defeated Shah Shuja in the Battle of Khajwah.

06 JANUARY



1966 Oscar-winning Indian composer AR Rahman was born.

1959 One of the all-rounders of the country, Kapil Dev was born on this day.

1932 Famous Hindi writer Kamleshwar was born.

1928 Indian playwright and theatergoer Vijay Tendulkar was born.

1885 Bharatendu Harishchandra, one of the leading Hindi poets and writers of modern India, died.

1918 Bharata Vyas, the famous lyricist of Bollywood, was born.

07 JANUARY

1967 Irrfan Khan, who rejuvenated the characters of Hindi cinema world, stepped into the world.

1980 After less than three years of the overthrow of power due to emergency, the people of India once again handed over the reins of the country to Indira Gandhi.

08 JANUARY

1965 The first Indian cinema film to win internationally acclaimed filmmaker Bimal Roy. On this day, he said goodbye to the world.

1984 The first Indian woman pilot Sushma Mukhopadhyay died.

Even as Prime Minister Narendra Modi extended Christmas greetings to the nation, several states across India reported disruptions of Christmas celebrations, vandalism of decorations and protests outside churches in the days leading up to and including December 25. The incidents were reported from Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Kerala, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Uttarakhand.

On December 25, Prime Minister Modi wished citizens "hope, warmth and a renewed commitment to kindness" and shared a video of himself attending a Christmas service at a church. However, reports from multiple regions described confrontations involving individuals and groups associated with Hindutva organizations, with police intervention in some cases.

Madhya Pradesh: Jabalpur Incident

One of the most widely reported incidents occurred in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh, where a BJP leader and others disrupted a Christmas-related luncheon a few days before Christmas. The Jabalpur city BJP vice-president, Anju Bhargava, was seen in videos verbally abusing attendees from a blind school and physically heckling a visually impaired woman for attending a church event.

Following public backlash on social media, the BJP issued a show-cause notice to Bhargava.

Chhattisgarh: Bandh and Violence

In Chhattisgarh, Hindutva groups had called for a state-wide bandh on December 24, citing alleged illegal religious conversions. The bandh followed communal clashes in Bade Tewada village of Kanker district earlier this month.

In Raipur, a group chanting "Jai Sri Ram" entered Magneto Mall on Christmas Eve and vandalised property after alleging that the mall had not supported the bandh. Police registered a complaint against more than 40 unidentified individuals based on video evidence circulating on social media.

Abha Gupta, marketing head of the mall, told the media that 50 to 100 people entered the closed premises carrying sticks and hockey sticks and questioned staff members about their religion and caste.

In Kanker district, more than 30 people allegedly attacked homes of families who had converted to Christianity several years ago. According to residents interviewed by television channels, the affected tribal families said they had adopted Christianity voluntarily.

Uttar Pradesh: Protests Outside Churches

In Bareilly, members allegedly linked to Bajrang Dal and Vishva Hindu Parishad gathered outside St. Alphonsus Cathedral Church on December 24 and recited the Hanuman Chalisa. Police were deployed at the site. The groups later submitted a memorandum to the police alleging that church activities during Christmas were intended to defame Hinduism.

On December 25, Bajrang Dal workers staged a protest outside the Kotwali police station in Bareilly, demanding that a case be registered against the church.

In Ghaziabad, a video circulated online showing a group chanting "Jai Sri Ram" near worshippers praying at St. Thomas

Haters and bigots disrupt Christmas celebrations across India



Orthodox Maha Idavaka Church. Fact-checkers later confirmed the incident took place in Ghaziabad and not in Delhi, as initially claimed on social media.

Assam: Decorations Vandalised

In Assam, Christmas decorations at St. Mary's School in Panigaon were vandalised on December 24. Videos showed installations being destroyed and set on fire while slogans were raised. In a separate incident in Nalbari, individuals were seen removing Christmas decorations from shops and burning them. Nalbari SSP Bibekananda Das confirmed that four people were arrested in connection with the vandalism and said they were affiliated with Bajrang Dal and Vishva Hindu Parishad.

Kerala: Attack on Carolers

In Palakkad, Kerala, a group of Christmas carolers was allegedly attacked on December 21. According to police, one person, identified as Ashwin Raj, was arrested after a case was registered.

Gujarat: Mall Installation Removed

In Ahmedabad, alleged members of Hindutva outfits entered Palladium Mall on December 27 and dismantled Christmas installations. Mall authorities said staff members were threatened during the incident.

Rajasthan and Uttarakhand: Events Restricted

In Rajasthan's Sriganganagar district, the additional district education officer issued a directive asking private schools not to ask students to wear Santa Claus costumes. The directive followed a letter from an organisation named Bharat-Tibet Sahyog Manch. State authorities later clarified that the decision was taken at the local level without instructions from the



Police Response

education minister or education directorate. In Haridwar, Uttarakhand, a Christmas programme scheduled at a hotel run by the Uttar Pradesh tourism department was cancelled following objections raised by Hindutva groups.

Police action was reported in several cases, including arrests in Assam and registration of cases in Chhattisgarh and Kerala. Authorities said investigations were ongoing in other incidents.



Hrithik Roshan in talks to lead Don 3 after Ranveer Singh's exit: Report

Hrithik Roshan is reportedly being considered as the new lead of Don 3 following Ranveer Singh's reported exit from the film. According to industry buzz, the makers are exploring the possibility of bringing Hrithik on board to take forward the iconic franchise.

The idea of Hrithik stepping into the Don universe isn't entirely new for fans. Many will recall his stylish cameo in Don 2, where Shah Rukh Khan's character used advanced technology to disguise himself as Hrithik during a crucial heist sequence. While it is still unclear if Farhan Akhtar and his team plan to connect that moment to the new storyline, the possibility has certainly fuelled excitement among audiences.

According to a source quoted by Filmfare, the makers are actively considering Hrithik Roshan as a strong option to lead the franchise forward. "Following Ranveer's exit, Hrithik has emerged as a strong contender for the role. While discussions are still at a very early stage, it will be interesting to see whether Hrithik ultimately comes on board," the source revealed.

The pressure surrounding Don 3 is understandably high. The franchise carries a powerful legacy, having been led by Amitabh Bachchan in the 1978 original and later redefined by Shah Rukh Khan in the 2006 and 2011 films. The makers are reportedly keen on choosing someone with proven stardom and a solid body of work to live up to that legacy.

Reports suggest that the search for a new lead began after Ranveer Singh moved on from the project following the massive success of Dhurandhar. While there has been no official confirmation from either the actor or the makers, it is believed that Ranveer is now focusing on Jai Mehta's upcoming film Pralay.

As speculation continues, all eyes are now on whether Hrithik Roshan will officially step into the role or if the makers will surprise audiences by introducing a completely new face to carry the Don legacy forward.

'Grave Sin': Nushrratt Bharuccha faces backlash over Mahakal Temple visit

Nushrratt Bharuccha recently visited the Shri Mahakaleshwar Jyotirlinga Temple in Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh. The actress participated in the sacred Bhasma Aarti and was honored with a stole by the temple priests.

Nushrratt's temple visit, intended to seek blessings ahead of the New Year 2026, became a subject of discussion due to her Muslim faith and religious tolerance. Some people questioned her decision to visit a Hindu temple, while one Muslim leader criticised her actions as a "grave sin".

Maulana Shahabuddin Razvi Barelvi, the National President of the All India Muslim Jamaat, stated that her acts of performing puja and applying sandalwood are a "grave sin", according to Sharia law. He asserted that such actions are against the fundamental principles of Islam. The Maulana demanded that the actress must offer repentance and recite the Kalma.

Nushrratt Bharuccha has been open about her liberal views on faith. In an interview with Shubhankar Mishra, the actress shared that she believes in finding peace in various places of worship, whether it's a temple, mosque, or church. "For me, my faith is real. Unreal things happen, and that's what strengthens my belief. That's why I'm still connected, still strong, and I know I have to follow this path," she said.



"Wherever you find peace, whether it's in a mandir, a gurudwara, or a church, you should go there. I even say this openly: I pray namaz. If I get time, I pray five times a day. I even carry my prayer mat while travelling. Wherever I go, I find the same peace and calm. I've always believed there's one God, and

different paths to connect with Him. And I want to explore all those paths," Nushrratt Bharuccha added.

On the work front, Nushrratt Bharuccha was last seen in the silent film Ufff Yeh Siyapaa. Her next major upcoming project is the film Bun Tikki, scheduled for a 2026 release.

'Bollywood distorting facts': Chinese media targets Salman Khan's 'Battle of Galwan'

China's state-run newspaper Global Times has strongly criticised the Salman Khan-starrer Battle of Galwan, just days after the film's teaser was released. Although the film is scheduled to hit cinemas next year, it has already sparked debate and backlash, especially among Chinese audiences online.

Battle of Galwan is based on the 2020 clash between Indian and Chinese troops in the Galwan Valley. In the film, Salman Khan plays Colonel Bikkumalla Santosh Babu.

The teaser, released on December 27, shows Salman Khan addressing his soldiers before moving towards the opposing side, gripping a stick as clashes unfold. The teaser ends with his character striking an individual, a sequence that has drawn sharp reactions.

According to Global Times, Chinese commentators have accused the film of presenting distorted facts. A Chinese military expert quoted by the publication said Bollywood films often focus on emotional storytelling and entertainment rather than accuracy. The expert added that no level of



cinematic exaggeration can change historical facts or weaken the People's Liberation Army's resolve to defend China's sovereign territory.

The film has also faced online criticism for its visuals. Some social media users compared scenes to Game of Thrones, questioning originality. Others pointed out issues with costumes, hairstyles and the portrayal of extreme weather conditions. Many Chinese netizens argued that the events

shown do not match what they describe as the facts of the 2020 clash.

While Indian media outlets promoted the film as showing Indian soldiers bravely defending their territory, Chinese users pushed back against this narrative. On Chinese microblogging website, Weibo, one user said the film seriously contradicts the facts, while another mocked the hype by saying, "When history falls short, Bollywood steps in."

Gwyneth Paltrow admits nepo baby privilege landed her role in Spielberg's Hook

Actor Gwyneth Paltrow admitted that receiving one of her first movie roles was a case of being a Hollywood "nepo baby," sharing that the part wasn't secured through an audition — but rather during a relaxed car ride with her famous godfather, director Steven Spielberg. Discussing the topic of privilege, she opened up about how she secured her role in Spielberg's 1991 film, *Hook*.

Paltrow, during SAG-AFTRA Foundation Conversations event earlier this month, when asked about how the casting process of *Hook* looked like said, "You know there are certain advantages to being a nepo baby, which were that Steven very close with Steven and Kate." Spielberg's wife, actor Kate Capshaw, has long been close to Paltrow's inner circle.

"Kate was actually my father's best friend. They were best friends. Kate Capshaw so I grew up with them they're really our family," Paltrow highlighted. The actor then mentioned that the offer for the film came as a surprise when she was in the back seat of a car, heading out with the group to watch the movie *The Silence of the Lambs*.

"I remember we were going, my father and I were going to see *The Silence of the Lambs* with Kate and Steven," the 53-year-old added. "We were going to the movie theatre and Steven was driving I was in the back seat and he kept like looking in the rearview mirror and squinting at me I was like, 'Do I have something on my face? Like what,'" the Marty Supreme actor emphasised.

The pivotal question that launched her screen career followed. According to Paltrow, who was 18 at the time, Spielberg simply asked, "And then he said, 'Gweny, will you do me a favor?'"

"'Would you play young Wendy in 'Hook' in this movie that I'm doing about Peter Pan?'" the *The Fabelmans* (2022) director questioned. The actor's immediate response was one of disbelief, a reaction she quickly retracted.

"I said, 'Oh, f**k off. You know, no,'" she initially recalled, before quickly correcting herself: "Oh, I did not say that I said, 'Yes, I will. I will do that.'" Although the role was brief, the moment remains a significant and lasting memory in her acting journey. Paltrow features in *Marty Supreme*, alongside Timothee Chalamet. Chalamet features in and has produced Josh Saffdie's upcoming sports comedy-drama, a fictionalised story about a professional ping pong player. Although the film is not a biopic, it's speculated to be inspired by the life of table tennis champion Marty Reisman.



Will Smith sued for sexual harassment, ex-tour violinist seeks damages

A case of sexual harassment has been filed against actor Will Smith, with a violinist from his *Based on a True Story* 2025 tour accusing the Hollywood star and his management company of misconduct and wrongful termination.

Brian King Joseph, who performed with Smith during the tour, has filed a lawsuit against the actor and his management firm, Treyball Studios Management, in a Los Angeles court. The suit, filed on December 31, alleges sexual harassment, retaliation and wrongful dismissal following an incident that reportedly took place during the tour's Las Vegas stop in March. According to the complaint reviewed by *Variety*, Joseph claims he returned to his hotel room—booked by Smith's company—to find signs that someone had entered without his consent. He alleges discovering a sexually suggestive message, wipes, a beer bottle, HIV medication prescribed to another individual, and hospital discharge paperwork. Among the items was a handwritten note that read, "Brian, I'll be back no later [sic] 5:30, just us," followed by a heart symbol and the name "Stone F."

Joseph states that he immediately informed hotel security and alerted representatives from Smith's team. He also reported the matter to a non-emergency police line.

Jennifer Lopez opens up on life after divorce: In my happy era

Actor-singer Jennifer Lopez opened up about her life and relationships, including her divorce from Ben Affleck, during the first night of her Las Vegas residency, *Up All Night*, at The Colosseum at Caesars Palace. She reflected on how much her life has changed and said that she is in her "happy era."

Jennifer spoke to the audience, discussing the significant ways her life has transformed since her previous Las Vegas residency a decade ago at Planet Hollywood's Zappos Theatre, as reported by *People*. She said, "It's such a huge honour to be asked back. Do you know it's been 10 years since my last residency here? Almost 10 years to the day. It was in January. That went by in a blink, didn't it?"

And in that time, I've only been married twice. That's not true. It was only once. It felt like twice. I'm just kidding. It's over and we just it's fine. The good news is that I'm learning, and I'm growing, and we're in our happy era. I'm in my happy era.

Jennifer and Ben initially dated between 2002 and 2004, having first met while working on the film *Gigli*. They rekindled their relationship in 2021, leading to their marriage in July 2022. However, the *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (2025) actor filed for divorce in August 2024, which coincided with the timing of their second wedding anniversary in Georgia.

In an earlier interview with *CBS News Sunday Morning*, Jennifer called the separation transformative, saying, "Because it changed me. It helped me grow in a way that I needed to grow." However, Jennifer and Ben have maintained an amicable relationship. They recently attended the premiere of Jennifer's film, *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (which Ben produced), and were observed shopping together in Los Angeles in December 2025 alongside Affleck's son, Samuel.

Jennifer directly confronted trolls from the stage about her bold fashion choices and age during the launch of her *Up All Night* residency in Las Vegas.





South Koreans now free to read North's newspaper, once banned as seditious

In a quiet but symbolically significant shift, South Korea has eased long-standing restrictions on access to North Korea's official newspaper, Rodong Sinmun, reflecting a renewed effort to reduce tensions and promote understanding between the two Koreas.

For decades, the publication known for its strong propaganda, missile coverage, and praise of North Korea's leadership was considered so inflammatory that South Koreans were barred from reading it without special permission.

Under the current administration of President Lee Jae Myung, however, citizens can now view the newspaper at select public libraries without prior approval, marking a departure from Cold War-era controls.

President Lee has downplayed fears surrounding the move, suggesting that exposure to the paper would not sway public ideology but could instead help people better understand the realities of life and politics in the North.

While opinions in Seoul remain divided, some citizens see the change as unnecessary or unsettling, while others believe few people will actively seek out a state-controlled publication in an era where print media is already declining.

NEW YORK (TIP)

Russia has formally asked the United States to stop chasing an oil tanker that was headed to Venezuela and is now fleeing a U.S. Coast Guard vessel in the Atlantic Ocean. Russia's request was first reported by The New York Times, which quoted two people familiar with the matter.

They said the diplomatic note was delivered to the State Department late on New Year's Eve and was also sent to the Homeland Security Council at the White House.

Meanwhile, Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro said he's open to negotiations with Washington on combating drug trafficking.

"The U.S. government knows, because we've told many of their spokespeople, that if they want to seriously discuss an agreement to combat drug trafficking, we're ready," Maduro said in a taped interview that aired Thursday on state television channel teleSUR, according to NBC News.

Tanker dispute intersects Trump's

Swiss bar fire that killed 40 likely caused by champagne sparklers: Officials

BERN (TIP)

Sparklers attached to champagne bottles and held too close to the ceiling likely sparked the deadly fire at the "Le Constellation" bar in Crans-Montana, Switzerland, during a New Year's party, killing at least 40 people, CNN quoted officials as saying.

The blaze reportedly spread rapidly due to a flashover, and Swiss prosecutors have opened an investigation into possible criminal responsibility.

Earlier, at a press conference in Crans-Montana, Valais Cantonal Police Commander Frederic Gisler said authorities responded swiftly after a fire was reported at a bar in the area. According to Gisler, smoke was first seen coming from the bar in the centre of the Swiss ski resort at around 1:30 am. Moments later, a witness contacted the emergency call centre to report the incident. A red alert was immediately issued to mobilise firefighting services, he added. The first teams from the Crans-Montana intercommunal police and the gendarmerie reached the scene at 1:32 am, and were soon joined by additional emergency responders, CNN reported.

"Their initial assignment was obviously to take care of the victims, to provide them emergency help," Gisler said. He noted that firefighters managed to extinguish the blaze quickly. "Following that, the initial investigations were able to start," he said. Reception centres were later set up to assist those affected by the incident, and a helpline was launched at 4:14 am to provide information and support to families. "All of the injured people had received care by shortly after 5 am, thanks to this widescale mobilisation," CNN quoted Gisler as saying.

Families of those who lost their lives in the fire at Crans-Montana are facing a painful wait, as local authorities said it could take several days to identify all of the approximately 40 victims, CNN reported.

"Currently and in the days to come, the priority will be identifying the people who have died so that their bodies can be returned quickly to their families," Gisler said in a press conference.

Swiss bar fire was like 'hell': Survivors recount ski resort blaze

Ring in the new year with a night of drinking and dancing high in the Swiss Alps, Ebenezer Mehari, 17,



decided to take a breather outside the packed Constellation Bar.

As he turned to go back inside, he told NBC News at the scene Friday, "hell" erupted as a deadly fire broke out. "I heard a big boom, and everybody was screaming," he said.

Mehari said a thick smoke enveloped the venue and the crowd, blinding him. He fell to the ground as people rushed to escape the bar, he said, but a man pulled him away to safety. His friends were not so lucky, he says. "I have four friends who died," he said, still struggling to process the loss. "For me, it's not real."

Axel Clavier, 16, from Paris, told The Associated Press that he lost his jacket, shoes and phone while fleeing, though he was grateful to have made it out. "I am still alive and it's just stuff," he said. "I'm still in shock."

Samuel Rapp said he was at a restaurant next door when the fire broke out.

"A lot of people were screaming and it was horrible," Rapp told NBC News' British broadcasting partner Sky News. "People were walking on everybody," he said, adding that he "saw a lot of people on the floor, and I think these people were dead because someone put jackets on their faces."

Russia asks US to stop pursuit of fleeing oil tanker, NY Times reports

Ukraine talks and Venezuela oil blockade

The dispute comes as President Donald Trump is trying to negotiate a peace deal between Russia and Ukraine. During a recent meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy at Mar-a-Lago, both leaders projected hope for a resolution. However, The Times noted that complex negotiations regarding territory and security assurances remain unresolved.

At the same time, the tanker confrontation is tied to Trump's effort to pressure Maduro by imposing what The Times described as a quasi-blockade on some oil tankers, and what Trump called a "total and complete" maritime blockade of Venezuela's oil exports.

Energy Intelligence reported that the U.S. seized the Skipper and boarded the



Centuries, and that Venezuelan crude is piling up on ships and in limited onshore storage. US calls tanker 'stateless' as Russia rushes flag registration

American forces have been tracking the very large crude carrier, originally named Bella 1, for nearly two weeks. U.S. officials said that the tanker began its voyage in Iran and was headed to Venezuela to load oil when the Coast

Guard tried to stop and board it in the Caribbean Sea.

According to The Times, American authorities determined the ship was not displaying a legitimate national flag during the initial encounter, giving the Coast Guard legal authority to board and inspect the vessel. U.S. authorities reportedly held a court-approved seizure warrant based on the vessel's history of transporting Iranian oil that the United States alleges is sold to finance terrorism.

The crew, however, refused to allow the Coast Guard to board the ship and steered back toward the Atlantic. In the following days, U.S. officials said the crew painted a Russian flag on the hull and radioed the Coast Guard to claim they were sailing under Russian authority.

China taxes condoms, contraceptive drugs in bid to spur birth rate

China removed a three-decade-old tax exemption on contraceptive drugs and devices from January 1 in new steps to spur a flagging birth rate. Condoms and contraceptive pills now incur value-added tax of 13%, the standard rate for most consumer goods.

The move comes as Beijing struggles to boost birth rates in the world's second-largest economy. China's population fell for a third consecutive year in 2024 and experts have cautioned the downturn will continue.

China exempted childcare subsidies from personal income tax and rolled out an annual childcare subsidy last year, following a series of "fertility-friendly" measures in 2024, such as urging colleges and universities to provide "love education" to portray marriage, love, fertility and family in a positive light. Top leaders again pledged last month at the annual Central Economic Work Conference to promote "positive marriage and childbearing attitudes" to stabilise birth rates. China's birth rates have been falling for decades as a result of the one-child policy China implemented from 1980 to 2015, and rapid urbanisation. The high cost of childcare and education as well as job uncertainty and a slowing economy have also discouraged many young Chinese from getting married and starting a family.

SANAA (TIP)

Yemen's separatists have announced a two-year transition to independence despite reporting 20 deaths in air strikes from a Saudi-led coalition in the south of the country.

A military official from the separatist group — which is backed by the United Arab Emirates — announced on Friday, local time, that the fighters had been killed in air raids by the coalition on two military bases, an airport and other sites.

Mohammed Abdulmalik, head of the separatist Southern Transitional Council's (STC) in Wadi Hadhramaut and Hadhramaut Desert, said seven air strikes hit the Al-Khasha military camp.

Further strikes targeted other sites in the region and the airport and military base in Seiyun, STC military sources and eyewitnesses told Agence France-Presse.

The bombardment and surprise independence bid followed weeks of tensions between Saudi Arabia and the UAE over the STC's land-grab last month.

STC forces took much of resource-rich Hadhramaut, bordering Saudi Arabia, and neighbouring Mahra province on the Omani frontier, in a largely unopposed advance.

Yemen, which was divided into North and South from 1967 to 1990, could again be split in two years if the STC's independence plan comes to fruition.

It would call the new country "South Arabia".

STC President Aidaros Alzubidi said the transitional phase would include dialogue with Yemen's north — controlled by Iran-backed Houthi rebels — and a referendum on independence.

U.S. urges China to halt military pressure on Taiwan, days after Japan and others

TAIPEI (TIP)

The United States urged China to cease military pressure on Taiwan on Jan 1, days after Japan and Western countries voiced concern over escalating tensions in the Taiwan Strait following two days of large-scale military exercises around the democratic island.

"China's military activities and rhetoric toward Taiwan and others in the region increase tensions unnecessarily," State Department spokesman Thomas Pigott said in a statement. "We urge Beijing to exercise restraint, cease its military pressure against Taiwan, and instead engage in meaningful dialogue."

The United States, Pigott added, "supports peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait and opposes unilateral changes to the status quo, including by force or coercion."

The State Department's criticism was the first public response by the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump to this week's Chinese military exercises.

Taiwanese Foreign Minister Lin Chia-lung welcomed the U.S. government's statement, saying that Taipei "will continue to work with the United States and all like-minded nations to defend the rules-based international order."

But under Trump, Washington — which is bound by law to provide Taiwan



with the means to defend itself, despite the lack of formal diplomatic ties — has taken a softer approach to Chinese pressure on the island than its predecessors, as the White House looks to avoid friction with Beijing in a bid to seal a broad trade deal with the Asian powerhouse.

Trump, who is scheduled to make a state visit to the Chinese capital in April for talks with leader Xi Jinping, on Monday downplayed the exercises and the possibility of Xi ordering an invasion of Taiwan.

Beijing views the self-ruled island as its "core of core issues" and regards it as a renegade province that must be unified with the mainland, by force if necessary.

"I have a great relationship with President Xi. And he hasn't told me anything about it. I certainly have seen it," Trump said when asked about the exercises. "I don't believe he's going to be doing it," Trump said in apparent

reference to a Chinese invasion of the island.

Asked if the exercises concerned him, he replied, "No, nothing worries me."

"They've been doing naval exercises for 20 years in that area," he added. "Now people take it a little bit differently."

Japan's Foreign Ministry said Wednesday that Tokyo had presented its concerns to the Chinese side over the drills, which it said "constitute actions that increase tensions across the Taiwan Strait." Japan, Australia, Britain, France, Germany, New Zealand and the European Union all voiced concern over the exercises before the U.S.

On Friday, China called the exercises "completely legitimate, necessary and beyond reproach."

"No one cherishes peace across the Taiwan Strait more than we do, yet we will never allow any individual or force to tie our hands in curbing 'Taiwan independence' separatist activities in the name of safeguarding cross-Strait peace," Chinese Defense Ministry spokesperson Zhang Xiaogang said.

Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te said in a New Year's speech Thursday in Taipei that the island is determined to defend its sovereignty and pledged to boost its defenses — something the Trump administration has demanded — in response to China's growing pressure.

Yemen separatists announce plan to split country after 20 killed in Saudi-led strikes



But he warned the group would declare independence "immediately" if there was no dialogue or if southern Yemen was attacked again.

"The Council calls on the international community to sponsor dialogue between the concerned parties in the South and the North," Mr Alzubidi said in a televised address.

"This constitutional declaration shall be considered

immediately and directly effective before that date [January 2, 2028] if the call is not heeded or if the people of the South, their land, or their forces are subjected to any military attacks," he added.

Meanwhile, the head of the country's Saudi-backed presidential council, Rashad al-Alimi, has asked Saudi Arabia to hold a forum with all factions in Yemen's south in a bid to ease tensions.

Saudi Arabia's foreign ministry welcomed the request, calling on the factions — including the STC — to "formulate a comprehensive vision for fair solutions to the southern cause".

Both Saudi Arabia and the Emirates intervened in Yemen's civil war in 2015 as the major players in a coalition fighting the Houthis in the north.

But after a brutal, decade-long civil war, the Houthis remain in place, and the Saudis and Emiratis are backing different factions in the government-held territories. Yemen's Aden-based government comprises a fractious coalition of groups, including the STC, united by their opposition to the Houthis.

The UAE, which withdrew most of its troops from Yemen in 2019, pledged to pull out the remainder after the coalition's air strikes earlier this week on an alleged weapons shipment at Mukalla port, despite denying it contained arms.

Family of Hindu man attacked in Bangladesh in shock

The family of Khokon Chandra Das on Friday recounted the horrors of the brutal attack on him, saying that the motive of the mob behind the attack was unclear as he was a peaceful man.

Das is currently undergoing treatment in Dhaka after suffering 30 per cent burns in the attack.

His wife, Seema Das, was inconsolable as she spoke to ANI. Carrying her infant in her arms, she lamented how Das was caught hold off by miscreants as he was about to enter the house and was attacked.

"My husband, who is a businessman, was entering the house when he was attacked by a mob with gasoline and was set on fire. He is a patient man who leads a peaceful life. He has no enmity with anyone, and we are unable to understand the motive behind the attack," she said.

Anjana Rani Das, the sister of the victim, said that Das was left bloodied after he was attacked with sticks on his head. "The attack occurred at 8.30 pm. The crowd hit him on the head and poured gasoline on him before setting him on fire. He tried to jump in the water while crying for help," she said, recounting the gruesome attack.

Sourabh Das, nephew of Khokon Das, told ANI that he rushed to the hospital soon after knowing of the attack and his uncle was critical.

"I reached the hospital as soon as I got the call about my uncle being attacked. The police reached the scene and is investigating the matter. My uncle's face and hands were burnt," he said.

Pranto Das, another nephew of the victim, demanded thorough investigation into the attack.

RAWALPINDI (TIP)

Pakistani archaeologists have uncovered rare decorative stones and ancient coins during excavations at a UNESCO-listed site near the historic city of Taxila, offering fresh insight into the earliest urban settlement of the vast ancient civilisation.

The finds were made at the ancient Bhir Mound, where experts discovered decorative stones dating back to the 6th century BC along with coins from the 2nd century AD.

According to Dawn, officials described the discovery as the most significant at the site in the past decade.

The report said archaeologists recovered fragments of metamorphic decorative stone identified as lapis lazuli, along with rare bronze coins attributed to the Kushan dynasty, significantly advancing the material understanding of ancient Gandhara.

Aasim Dogar, deputy director of the Punjab Department of Archaeology and head of the excavation team, confirmed the preliminary assessment of the

Pak court sentences journalists to life over links to 2023 protests after Imran Khan's arrest

ISLAMABAD (TIP)

An anti-terrorism court in Pakistan has sentenced seven people — including journalists, YouTubers and former military officials — to two life terms each over cases linked to the violence that followed the 2023 arrest of former Prime Minister Imran Khan.

The verdict relates to the nationwide unrest on May 9, when Khan's detention triggered large-scale protests by supporters of his Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf party. Protestors torched army installations and vandalised state property in several cities, prompting a sweeping crackdown by authorities.

Those convicted include YouTuber Adil Raja; journalists Wajahat Saeed Khan, Sabir Shakir and Shaheen Sehba; television anchor Haider Raza Mehdi; analyst Moeed Pirzada; and former army official Akbar Hussain. Cases were registered at Islamabad's Ramna and Aabpara police stations.

Prosecutors accused the seven of engaging in what they termed "digital terrorism against state institutions", alleging they used online platforms to incite violence and unrest during and after the protests, according to news agency PTI.

Islamabad-based Anti-Terrorism Court Judge Tahir Abbas Sipra announced the verdicts after reserving judgment earlier. As all the accused were abroad and did not return to face trial, the proceedings were conducted in absentia under Pakistan's anti-terrorism laws. The court sentenced each convict to rigorous life imprisonment on two counts: waging or attempting to wage war against Pakistan, and criminal conspiracy. Each was also fined 500,000 Pakistani rupees per offence. In addition to the life terms, the court also imposed a combined 35 years of further imprisonment under other legal provisions and an additional fine of 1.5 million rupees on each individual. Failure to pay any of the fines would result in an extra six months in prison, according to the court orders.

Each judgment noted that the convicts have the right to appeal before the Islamabad High Court within seven days.

Among those sentenced are three former army officials — Raja, Mehdi and Hussain — with Raja and Mehdi also active as YouTubers. The remaining convicts are journalists known for views sympathetic to Imran Khan. All left Pakistan after his government was removed from power and did not return to contest the charges.



'Chinese leaders were in constant touch.': Pakistan takes U-turn on Operation Sindoor

Amid heightened tensions between India and Pakistan, the ceasefire agreement between the two countries has turned into a focal point for international concern. Most notably, US President Donald Trump claimed that his administration had taken an active role in preventing a war between these two nuclear nations. Additionally, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi recently said "tensions between India and Pakistan" were among the list of hotspot issues mediated by China this year. On the diplomatic front, China claimed that, on May 7, it called on India and Pakistan to exercise restraint even while expressing regret over India's airstrikes.

As China has made a serious and high-profile statement on the issue, its close ally Pakistan has now responded with a major statement that has further intensified the debate.

Initially, Pakistan gave credit to the US and Trump for establishing the ceasefire and had maintained that position until recently. However, Pakistan now appears to be transitioning away from that position to one that provides equal recognition to China. In doing so, it is supporting China's assertion that it played a mediating role in resolving the issues that were the cause of hostilities between the two countries.

Pakistan Foreign Office spokesperson, Tahir Andrabi, has stated that the statement made by China is accurate. Addressing a press briefing on Thursday, Pakistani Foreign Office spokesperson Tahir Andrabi said Beijing remained closely engaged with Islamabad throughout the period of heightened tension.

Pakistan archaeologists discover ancient coins and decorative stones at Unesco site near Taxila

artefacts. "The decorative stones are lapis lazuli, a prized semi-precious stone, while the coins belong to the Kushan period," Dogar said.

The excavation team sought specialised forensic support to date the metal artefacts. Dogar said detailed numismatic analysis carried out by experts from the University of Peshawar confirmed that the coins bear the image of Emperor Vasudeva, whom historians recognise as the last of the 'great Kushan rulers' to govern the region.

Dogar explained that the obverse side of the recovered coins depicts Vasudeva, while the reverse shows a female religious deity. He described this imagery as a defining feature of Kushan-era religious pluralism, which frequently integrated diverse theological traditions.

The artefacts were unearthed on the



northern side of the site, specifically in the B-2 trench — one of 16 trenches currently under excavation. Dogar said surrounding evidence indicates that the area functioned as a residential zone.

The latest discoveries reinforce the view that Taxila reached the height of its

political, cultural, and economic prominence during Kushan rule, particularly between the 1st and 3rd centuries AD. "Under emperors such as Kanishka the Great, Taxila emerged as a major administrative, commercial, and intellectual centre," Dogar said.

He added that extensive Kushan patronage of Buddhism during this period resulted in the construction of stupas, monasteries, and large religious complexes. The era also witnessed the flourishing of Gandharan art — a unique fusion of Greek, Roman, Persian, and Indian influences — with Taxila at its centre.

Malik Tahir Suleman, a leading numismatist, told Dawn that Kushan coins are among the most important historical sources for studying ancient South and Central Asia.

Sikh History This Week

JANUARY 2 TO JANUARY 8

2nd January

1741 Sukha Singh of Mari Kambo and Mehtab Singh of Mirankot entered Harimandir Sahib, Amritsar. They were disguised as Muslims. While Sukha Singh kept guard, Mehtab Singh beheaded Massa Raangadh and escaped together. Massa Rangadh had committed the heinous crime of converting Harimandir Sahib into a dancing hall where he smoked and wine. He was the garrison commander of Madiyala. He took control of Sri Harmandir Sahib as the land was prior property of Rangadhs. Mehtab Singh was later arrested and crushed to death after unspeakable torture on wheels.

SRI DARBAR SAHIB also known as Harminder Sahib and Golden Temple was constructed by Guru Arjun in the middle of an sacred water tank (sarowar).

In sunmat 1621, with Guru Amar Das's permission, Guru Ram Das started the digging of a tank (Taal) near villages Tugh, Gumtala, and Sultanwind. This digging was completed by Guru Arjun Dev in sunmat 1645 and named "Santoksar".

Simultaneously, with Guru Amar Das's permission, a village was established nearby and named "Guru Ka Chaak". Guru Sahib's residence in this village were popularly known as "Guru Kae Mahal". To the west of these residences, next to the tree known as "DukhBhanjani Baeri", the digging of a tank was started in 1634. However, this digging remained incomplete and was eventually completed by Guru Arjun Dev after he ascended to the Gur Gadhi. Guru Arjun Dev vigorously pushed all of the projects initiated by Guru Ram Das. He invited business people, scholars, and skilled people from all over, to come and settle around this area and establish new markets. As a result this area came to known as "Ramdas Pur". Bhai Sallo is especially noted for his hard work in establishing and populating this area. His contributions are extremely noteworthy.

In sunmat 1643, the construction of permanent sarowar began and its name changed to "Amritsar". As a result the surrounding city also adopted the "Amritsar" name. On magh 1, sunmat 1645, Guru Arjun Dev Patshah asked Sain Mian Meer to lay the foundation stone of Harminder Sahib. The foundation stone was laid right in the middle of the sarowar and upon completion of its construction, Sri Guru Granth Sahib's prakash was established in sunmat 1661.

3rd January



1961 Master Tara Singh was released from jail, where he was confined in connection with Punjabi Suba agitation. Master Tara Singh was born on 24 June, 1885, in Haryal in Rawalpindi district of North Western Province of undivided India. His mother, Moolan Devi, was a pious lady and his father, Bakshi Gopi Chand, was a patwari of the village and was a well known and respected person. Tara Singh's original name was Nanak Chand. In 1902 Nanak Chand embraced Sikhism and came to be called Tara Singh.

4th January

1909 Baba Ratta Singh Ji Nirankari passed away. Barsi celebrations are observed every year.

NIRANKARI: a particular branch of GurSikh faith, established by Bhai Dayal Singh Ji. A Saehajdhari Sikh resident of Peshwar, GurSahai Ji, had a son named RamSahai Ji who married Ladhaki, daughter of Vasakha Singh (treasurer for the tenth Guru). Bhai Dayal Singh was born from this marriage on 15 Vaisakh sunmat 1840 (1783).

5th January



1666 Prakash Utsav Tenth Patshah, Guru Gobind Singh Ji. GURU GOBIND SINGH JI (1666-1708), tenth Patshah of the Sikh faith, was born on Saturday, Dec. 22, 1666 at Patna Sahib to father Guru Tegh Bahadur Patshah and Matta Gujri. On, Nov. 11, 1675, he assumed Guruship at Anandpur Sahib.

Since early childhood, Guru Sahib was keen on weapons and their use. It is for this reason, that Guru Sahib became a scholar on weapons and mastered their usage, at a very early age. Guru Sahib continually emphasized scholarly works throughout his life. As a results, scholars around the world traveled long distances to participate and receive honors in his courts. He was always surrounded by renowned scholars. One of Guru Sahib's objective was to translate all scholarly works in Gurmukhi and commissioned several such translations. His vision of Sikh Kaum included a communion of scholars. In an attempt to turn Anandpur Sahib as the center of knowledge, Guru Sahib actively encouraged and sent Sikhs to study at various renowned institutions in the world.

To uplift the suppressed people, Guru Sahib instituted the tradition of Amrit during Vaisakhi diwan of sunmat 1756 at KeshGadh Sahib. Further he established a communion of Amritdharis (who received Amrit) and called it Khalsa. Guru Sahib, himself was the sixth member of the Khalsa order.

He had four sons from Mata Jeeto and Sundari, namely, Baba Ajit Singh, Baba Zujar Singh, Baba

Zorawar Singh, and Baba Fateh Singh Ji. All four sacrificed their lives to protect and further the growth of the institutional plant sown by Guru Sahib.

1923 Karam Singh of Jhingar and Dalip Singh of Gossal were arrested.

1924 Morcha launched for the possession of lands belonging to Gurudwara Pheru, Lahore.

6th January



1846 Battle of Budowal between Sikhs and British.

1989 Sirdar Satwant Singh and Kehar Singh hanged for gunning down Indira Gandhi. As Prime Minister of India, she had ordered the June 1984 attack on Harimandir Sahib by the Indian Armed Forces.

Sardar Satwant Singh and Sardar Kehar Singh were hanged till death. They were co-accused with Sardar Beant Singh for gunning down Indira Gandhi on October 31, 1984. Sikh Panth holds Indira Gandhi, then Prime Minister of India, responsible for the dessication of Harminder Sahib in 1984's Bluestar operation.

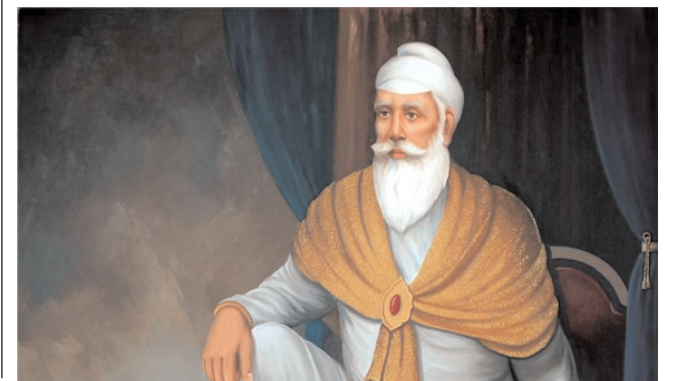
7th January

1924: 62 members of the SGPC were arrested from the precincts of Sri Darbar Sahib under Section 120, 121 (2) Indian Penal Code (Sedition) and Section 17A and 17B of the Act of 1908 by Special order of Punjab Governor.

1974: Through the efforts of Bhai Sahib Harbhajan Singh Yogi, the US Army Dress Code was amended to allow Sikhs to wear beards and turbans and to maintain the five Kakkars.

8th January

1685 Baba Aalla Singh, founder of Patiala State, was born. BABA AALLA SINGH JI was born in village Phull to father Baba Ram Singh "Phulwansi" and mother Saabhi. He was introduced to amrit by Baba Deep Singh Ji, in TheekriWalae village. In sunmat 1810, he laid the foundation stone of a temporary structure for the Patiala fort while the construction of a permanent structure began in sunmat 1820. Simultaneously he founded the Patiala city. Barnala, Longowal, Sunaam, Bathinda, and Patiala were under his control. He passed away on 22nd Aug. 1765 in Patiala.



Hair contouring: Right hairstyle can make your face look slimmer

In the world of beauty and grooming, makeup is no longer the only tool used to contour and define facial features. Enter hair contouring—a clever, non-invasive styling technique that uses strategic haircuts, coloring, and styling to visually slim down the face. Much like makeup contouring enhances bone structure with light and shadow, hair contouring reshapes perception, drawing attention to your best features while softening or minimizing others.

What Is Hair Contouring?

Hair contouring is the art of using lengths, layers, volume placement, parting, and colour tones to balance facial proportions. By playing with dimension and movement, hairstylists can create the illusion of a longer, narrower, or more sculpted face—without scissors near your cheekbones or filters on your camera. This technique is especially popular for those who want a slimmer-looking face without drastic changes, making it ideal for everyday elegance as well as red-carpet-ready transformations.

Understanding Face Shape: The Foundation of Contouring

Effective hair contouring begins with understanding your face shape. Whether round, square, heart-shaped, oval, or diamond, each shape responds differently to volume and length.

- Round faces benefit from vertical lines, longer layers, and off-centre partings to elongate the face.
- Square faces look softer with textured layers and gentle waves that blur sharp jawlines.
- Heart-shaped faces balance well with volume near the jaw and chin, reducing emphasis on a wider forehead.
- Oval faces, already well-proportioned, can experiment freely but still gain definition through subtle contouring.
- Diamond faces are flattered by styles that soften cheekbones and add fullness near the crown or jaw.

Knowing your face shape allows hair contouring to work with your natural structure rather than against it.

The Power of Strategic Haircuts

The right haircut can instantly make the face appear slimmer. Long layers that start below the chin create length, while face-framing layers soften fullness around the cheeks. Avoid blunt cuts at jaw level if



you're trying to slim your face, as they tend to widen it visually.

Asymmetry is another powerful tool. Side-swept bangs or uneven partings break the symmetry of a round face, adding angles and dimension that naturally create a slimming effect.

Hair Color as Contour: Light and Shadow at Work

- Color plays a surprisingly important role in facial contouring. Darker shades recede, while lighter tones bring areas forward—just like makeup.
- Darker roots and shades near the face help slim the cheeks and jawline.
- Lighter highlights around the crown or mid-lengths draw the eye upward, elongating the face.
- Techniques like balayage, face-framing highlights, and shadow roots add depth without harsh contrast.
- subtlety is key. Natural transitions create a seamless, sculpted look rather than stark color blocks.

Styling Tricks That Instantly Slim the Face

Daily styling choices can dramatically influence how slim or full your face appears. Soft waves, loose curls, and movement around the face reduce the appearance of width. Sleek, flat styles pressed tightly against the cheeks can do the opposite, exaggerating roundness.

A deep side part is one of the easiest ways to contour with hair. It creates asymmetry, adds height at the crown, and visually narrows the face. Volume should be concentrated at the top and ends, not at cheek level.

FOOD CORNER

Moong Dal Kachori

INGREDIENTS

- 2 cup all purpose flour, 1/2 teaspoon salt, 2 cup refined oil
- 5 teaspoon refined oil, For Filling, 2 tablespoon chopped coriander leaves, 1 teaspoon coriander powder, 1/4 teaspoon red chilli powder, 1/2 teaspoon ginger powder, 1/4 teaspoon garam masala powder, 1/2 cup soaked moong dal, 2 cup chopped green chilli, 1 teaspoon fennel seeds powder, 1 gm asafoetida
- 1/2 teaspoon salt, 1/2 tablespoon cumin seeds

Method

- Take all purpose flour in a big bowl, add salt and oil. Mix well.
- Add little water at a time and knead soft dough. Cover the dough and keep it aside for 15-20 minutes.
- Preheat a pan and add 3-4 tbsp oil in it. Add cumin seeds, cumin seeds, asafoetida, green chilly, coriander powder, fennel powder and saute the spices for few minutes.
- Now add soaked dal, salt, garam masala, ginger powder and red chilly powder.
- Stir constantly and cook dal until it dries up. Allow it to cool and keep it separate.
- Now take one dough ball and flatten it with help of your fingers. Fill it with dal stuffing and make kachori. Repeat the process with other dough balls.
- Preheat oil in a wok. Fry the kachori till it turns golden brown.
- Crunchy moong dal kachori is ready.
- Serve hot with green coriander chutney or sweet chutney.



Secrets to glossy legs: Simple habits for radiant shine

Shiny, glowing legs are often seen as a sign of healthy, well-cared-for skin, and achieving that luminous look does not require expensive treatments or complicated routines. The secret lies in consistent care, gentle grooming, and proper nourishment of the skin. When the legs are smooth, hydrated, and evenly toned, they naturally reflect light, creating a soft, healthy shine.

The journey to glossy legs begins with exfoliation. Dead skin cells tend to accumulate on the legs, especially around the knees and ankles, making the skin look dull and rough. Regular exfoliation, done two to three times a week, helps remove this layer and reveals fresher skin underneath. Gentle scrubs made with sugar, coffee, or oatmeal improve circulation and enhance natural radiance without irritating the skin.

Hair removal also plays an important role in achieving shine. Smooth, hair-free skin reflects light



better and looks more polished. Whether you choose shaving, waxing, or epilation, using the right technique and following up with moisturiser is

essential. Shaving with a sharp razor and a hydrating gel prevents dryness, while waxing provides longer-lasting smoothness when paired with calming aftercare.

Moisturising is the most crucial step in maintaining shiny legs. Well-hydrated skin appears plump and radiant, while dryness causes dullness and uneven texture. Applying a nourishing body lotion immediately after bathing, when the skin is still slightly damp, helps lock in moisture. Ingredients like shea butter, glycerin, ceramides, and natural oils deeply condition the skin and enhance its glow. For an extra sheen, layering a light body oil over the lotion adds a subtle, healthy gloss. Body oils are especially effective when used correctly. A few warmed drops applied from the ankles upward can instantly give the legs a smooth, luminous finish. The key is moderation—too much oil can look greasy, while the right amount gives a soft shine.

Study finds anti-cholesterol drugs may reduce risk of death in diabetes

Statins, which help treat high cholesterol, may significantly reduce risk of death and major cardiovascular events in adults with type 2 diabetes, including among those considered at low cardiovascular risk, according to a study.

The findings published in the journal *Annals of Internal Medicine* challenge a long-standing uncertainty about whether patients at the lowest risk benefit from preventive statin therapy, and suggest that the drugs may have a broader protective value than previously assumed, researchers said.

Statin use in T2DM (type 2 diabetes) for primary prevention was associated with reductions in all-cause mortality and major CVD (cardiovascular disease) across the full spectrum of predicted cardiovascular risk," the authors wrote.

Statin use in T2DM (type 2 diabetes) for primary prevention was associated with reductions in all-cause mortality and major CVD (cardiovascular disease) across the full spectrum of predicted cardiovascular risk," the authors wrote.

Individuals who began taking statins were compared to those who did not, across varied levels of participants' predicted risk of heart disease.

"Statin use in T2DM (type 2 diabetes) for primary prevention was associated with reductions in all-cause mortality and major CVD (cardiovascular disease) across the full spectrum of predicted cardiovascular risk," the authors wrote.

Statin use in T2DM (type 2 diabetes) for primary prevention was associated with reductions in all-cause mortality and major CVD (cardiovascular disease) across the full spectrum of predicted cardiovascular risk," the authors wrote.

They added that the data suggests clinicians should consider the benefits of using statins in all adults with type 2 diabetes even when short-term predicted cardiovascular disease risk is low.

Is Makki Ki Roti Safe for Diabetics?

The short answer is yes, but there are essential safety guidelines to consider. Unlike refined flour (maida), which is not recommended for blood sugar



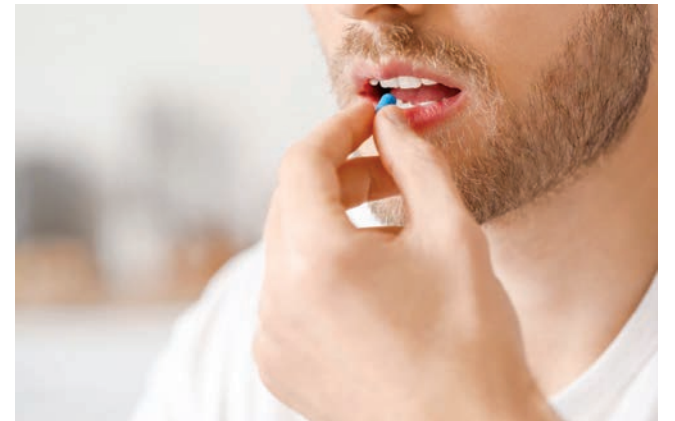
management, maize flour is a whole grain. This ancestral grain can provide multiple health benefits for those who are pre-diabetic or managing their health condition. Here are some specific ways maize flour roti can help diabetics:

The Glycaemic Index (GI) factor

The GI measures how quickly a food raises blood glucose levels. Maize flour has a GI ranging from 52 to 60, placing it in the low-to-medium category for blood sugar spikes. According to research published in the *Indian Journal of Endocrinology and Metabolism*, substituting high-GI foods like white rice and refined wheat with medium-GI grains like maize can significantly improve long-term glycaemic control.

Fibre content

Maize flour is naturally high in dietary fibre, which acts as a "speed bump" for sugar, slowing its absorption into the bloodstream. This prevents the sharp insulin spikes that diabetics strive to avoid.



Hormone-free male contraceptive pill moves closer to reality

For decades, contraceptive responsibility has largely rested with women, with men having only two reliable options—condoms or vasectomy. That imbalance may now be on the verge of change. A hormone-free male contraceptive pill called YCT-529 has successfully completed its first human safety trial, marking an important milestone in the global effort to expand birth-control options for men.

The pill is being developed by YourChoice Therapeutics, a San Francisco-based biotechnology company focused on non-hormonal contraceptive solutions.

The scientific work behind YCT-529 emerged from years of academic research led by Professor Gunda Georg at the University of Minnesota College of Pharmacy, with contributions from researchers at Columbia University.

YourChoice Therapeutics was formed to translate this university-led research into a viable contraceptive product for men—something scientists have long struggled to achieve safely.

The company's stated aim is to expand contraceptive choice by offering a reversible, oral, non-hormonal option for men, comparable in convenience to the female contraceptive pill.

YCT-529 is an oral, non-hormonal male contraceptive designed for daily use.

Unlike earlier experimental male contraceptives that attempted to suppress testosterone and were often associated with side effects such as mood changes, weight gain and reduced libido, this pill avoids altering male sex hormone levels.

Instead, it targets a biological pathway that is essential for sperm production and is largely specific to the testes.

Sperm production depends on retinoic acid, a metabolite of vitamin A that plays a critical role in initiating and sustaining spermatogenesis.

Retinoic acid functions by binding to a protein known as retinoic acid receptor alpha, or RAR-α, in the testes, which then activates genes required for sperm development.

How to consume peanuts without gaining weight

Do you enjoy spending winter afternoons snacking on peanuts while soaking up some sun? Peanuts are a popular choice during the colder months for several reasons. Their satisfying crunch and rich, nutty flavour make them a comforting snack on chilly days. They are also an excellent source of energy, which can be particularly beneficial in the winter. Peanuts are packed with essential nutrients, including protein, healthy fats, fibre, and various vitamins and minerals. Although they are high in calories and often associated with weight gain, several studies suggest that peanuts can actually assist with weight management.

Can snacking on peanuts lead to weight gain?

While peanuts are nutrient-dense, it's essential to be mindful of portion sizes since they are also calorie-dense. Consuming them in excess can lead to weight gain. However, when eaten in moderation, peanuts can fit into a



healthy diet without necessarily contributing to weight gain.

"Eating excessive amounts of peanuts may lead to weight gain (aside from the calorie density of their healthy fat content). While peanuts provide many healthy nutrients, including protein and fibre, which help people feel satisfied, they don't directly contribute to fat accumulation if consumed in controlled portions. In fact, weight gain typically occurs when an individual's daily total-calorie consumption exceeds what is required by the body on an

ongoing basis," explains Dr. Vivek Bindal, Senior Director & Head - Max Institute of Minimal Access, Bariatric & Robotic Surgery, Max Super Speciality Hospital, Vaishali.

"The maximum daily consumption of peanuts should be limited to 25g, either roasted or boiled with no added sugars or salt. The ideal way to consume peanuts is as a snack or part of a meal right before lunch (before noon). Do not consume them mindlessly or eat varieties that are fried or coated with oil. Diabetics, people with kidney disease, or persons with obesity will need to follow specific guidelines from their physician or dietitian," Dr. Bindal advised.

- Watch your portions: A handful (about 1 ounce or 28 grams) is typically a good serving size. This amount helps you enjoy their benefits without overindulging.
- Opt for unsalted versions: Choosing unsalted peanuts can help you avoid excess sodium, which can raise blood pressure and lead to other health issues.

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DR. SATISH AND GITANJLI ANAND



DR. SATISH ANAND
Former Chairman, Board of Trustees, AAPI National
E-Mail: sanandmd@gmail.com

GITANJLI ANAND
Former President, India Association of Long Island (IALI)
E-mail: gitanjliand@gmail.com

2026 could be Apple's biggest year yet: foldable iPhone, OLED MacBook, AI glasses and more

Apple had a hectic 2025. The Cupertino giant launched a host of products, be it the new MacBook Pro, the latest Apple Watch Ultra 3, and of course, the new iPhones. The iPhone 17 series came with major upgrades and some big design changes for the Pro models, with Apple also debuting the slimmest iPhone ever, the iPhone Air. However, if you thought that the tech giant was going to take things easy after such a busy year, you may be wrong.

As per reports, Apple may have an even busier 2026, with several upgrades planned across its product lineup. As always, India Today Tech will bring you all the updates as they happen. But for now, let's take a look at what the Cupertino giant may have in store for this year.

1. iPhone fold

Let's start with the elephant in the room. Apple is the only major phone maker left to enter the foldable smartphone market. And in 2026, the Cupertino giant is expected to finally join this race. As per reports, the first-ever foldable iPhone will make its debut in fall 2026, and may look like two iPhone Air devices stacked on one another.

The iPhone fold is expected to come in a book-like form factor, something we originally saw on the Pixel fold. The foldable iPhone is rumoured to come with a 5.25-inch cover screen, coupled with a 7.6-inch inner display. Both screens are said to be AMOLED panels. Apple is expected to ditch Face ID for the iPhone fold to keep the device thin, and use a side-mounted Touch ID sensor instead. The iPhone fold is tipped to be priced at \$2,400 (roughly Rs 2,15,000) in the US.

2. OLED MacBook

The MacBook Pro is one of the most powerful



machines out there. But there was one aspect where Apple seemed to be falling behind - the display. The MacBook Pro still comes with an IPS LCD display, and Apple may finally change it this year. As per Bloomberg, the next-generation MacBook Pro devices could get OLED displays with touch support, just like the iPhones. However, it is believed that only the M6 Pro and M6 Max variants of the MacBook Pro will get a new OLED screen, while the base M6 MacBook may still use an IPS panel.

The OLED MacBook Pro models are expected to launch in late 2026.

3. AI glasses

AI glasses have become increasingly popular over the

last couple of years, and now Apple may want a piece of this pie. The rumoured Apple AI glasses would likely compete with the Meta Ray-Bans. The headset is expected to come with built-in cameras, speakers with AI integration. You will likely be able to make phone calls, click pictures, and get answers via voice commands. Though you may not get a display.

Apple is expected to unveil the AI glasses by the end of this year. But a release may only happen by 2027.

4. iPhone 17e

Now, let's look at the device Apple is likely to launch first this year, the iPhone 17e. The iPhone 17e would be the second device in the company's e-series of iPhones. As per reports, the device will get the new A19 chipset from the iPhone 17 and slimmer bezels for the display. However, it is unclear if Apple will retain the notch from its predecessor.

Though the iPhone 17e is likely to come with MagSafe support, something the iPhone 16e lacked. Apple is expected to launch the iPhone 17e in February this year. The pricing of the iPhone 17e may remain unchanged from the iPhone 16e, which was launched in India for Rs 59,900.

5. iPhone 18 Pro and iPhone 18 Pro Max

The iPhone 17 Pro models came with big design changes and performance improvements. For the next Pro models, Apple is not expected to deliver the same magnitude of upgrades, but there is still plenty in store. The iPhone 18 Pro and iPhone 18 Pro Max will likely come in new colours with a unified design, instead of the dual-tone look on their predecessors. Recent leaks also suggest that Apple may go for under-display scanners for Face ID and remove the Dynamic Island.

Ahead of India launch, Starlink to lower all satellites in 2026 to boost space safety

As it prepares for a possible rollout of satellite internet services in India, Elon Musk-owned Starlink has announced a major change to how its satellite network will operate in space. The company plans to gradually lower the orbit of its entire constellation starting next year, a move it says is aimed at making Earth's increasingly crowded orbital environment safer.

Michael Nicolls, SpaceX's vice president of Starlink engineering, said the company will begin shifting satellites that currently operate at an altitude of around 550 km to a lower orbit of about 480 km through the course of 2026. According to Nicolls, bringing satellites closer to Earth helps reduce long-term risks linked to space debris and accidental collisions, which have become growing concerns as thousands of new spacecraft are launched every year. The announcement comes just weeks after Starlink disclosed a rare in-orbit incident involving one of its satellites. In December, the company said a satellite suffered an anomaly at an altitude of around 418 km, resulting in a small amount of debris and a complete loss of communication.

Voyager 1: Most distant human object from Earth to cross 1 light-day mark in 2026

Nasa's Voyager 1, the most distant human-made object in history, is about to cross a symbolic finish line that defines the true scale of our universe. By mid-November 2026, the venerable probe will reach a distance of one light-day from Earth. This milestone is not just a number; it is a profound testament to a journey that has lasted nearly half a century. It represents the furthest our technological voice has ever reached into the silent expanse of the cosmos, marking a new chapter in interstellar exploration.

WHAT IS ONE-LIGHT DAY?

A light-year refers to the distance travelled by light in one year, and a light-day represents the distance light travels in 24 hours through a vacuum. One can also say that one light-year has 365.25 Julian days. Light moves at roughly 3,00,000 kilometres per second.

One light year is equal to 9.46 trillion kilometres, and by dividing it by 365.25, the number of days in a Julian year, we get 25.9 billion kilometres, or approximately 26 billion kilometres.

The fact that Voyager 1 will be one light-day away from Earth in mid-November 2026 means it will be at a distance of 26 billion kilometres from us.

Similarly, the calculation of the distance of a light-day in kilometres can be made by multiplying the speed of light with the number of seconds in a day, which is 86,400 seconds.

REACHING THE 26-BILLION-KM MARK

At a staggering distance of 26 billion kilometres, any radio



command sent from mission control in California will take a full day to reach the spacecraft.

Its response, carrying data from the edge of our solar system, will take another 24 hours to return. This 48-hour round trip highlights the extreme isolation of our deepest interstellar scout.

Voyager 1 is currently so far away that the Sun appears as nothing more than an exceptionally bright star in its dark sky, yet it remains tethered to us by these invisible threads of data.

Launched on September 5, 1977, Voyager 1 was originally designed for a four-year mission to study Jupiter and Saturn.

It exceeded all expectations, revealing volcanic activity on Jupiter's moon Io and the intricate structure of Saturn's rings.

UK market milestone: FTSE 100 hits 10,000 mark for first time

LONDON (TIP)

The FTSE 100 index has climbed above 10,000 points for the first time, passing a significant stock market milestone, on the first trading day of the year.

Shares included in the index performed strongly in 2025, leaving the benchmark more than 21% higher than a year ago, when it stood at just over 8,260.

Rising share prices are good news for investors, including anyone with a pension or other savings that are invested in the stock market.

But the London index is dominated by large international companies, so is not a direct reflection of the UK economy's performance.

Share prices on the FTSE 100, which tracks the performance of the 100 largest companies listed on the London Stock Exchange, have surged over the past year, thanks to strong gains in some sectors including precious metal mining, defence and financial services.

Rising gold and silver prices boosted firms such as Rio Tinto, while increased global defence spending lifted contractors including Babcock and Rolls-Royce - amid economic uncertainty and geopolitical tensions.

The British benchmark set a new all-time intraday record as trading resumed after the new year holiday, rising more than 1% within the first hour to reach 10,046.3 points - up 114.9 from its previous level, before falling back below the threshold.

Susannah Streeter, an independent financial commentator, said the 10,000-point marker was "a psychologically important milestone" and showed London's blue-chip index was "back in favour" with investors.

"Concerns continue to swirl about the super-high valuation of US tech sector," she said, making the UK market more appealing.

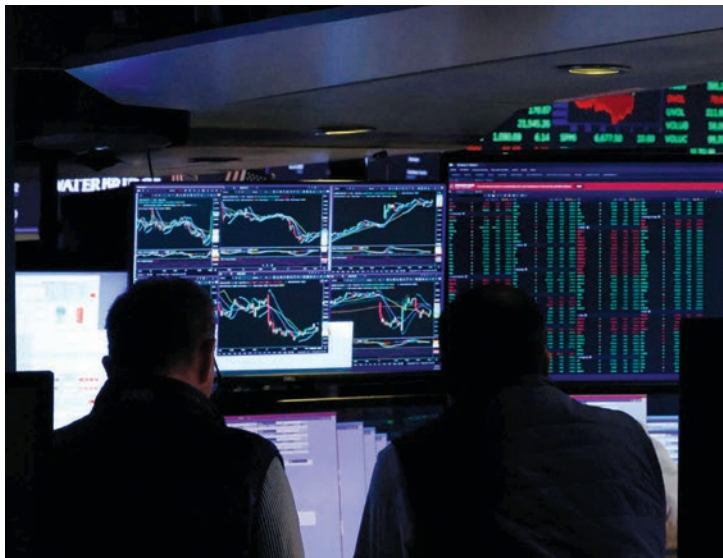
Dan Coatsworth, head of markets at AJ Bell, said crossing the 10,000-point was a New Year's gift for the chancellor, Rachel Reeves, who has been calling for more investment in the share market to boost economic growth.

"She has been banging the drum about the merits of investing over parking cash in the bank.

"The FTSE 100's achievements just go to show what's possible when buying UK shares," he said.

The FTSE 100's had outperformed US's S&P index in 2025, he added.

While some London-quoted companies were sometimes considered "old and boring" its mix of industries, including mining and banking, appealed to investors seeking stability during uncertain times, he said.



Asian markets sparkle in 2026 debut

Asia stock markets kicked off the new year on a high note on Friday, Jan 2, defying the late-December slump seen on Wall Street. The regional optimism was mirrored in global energy markets and U.S. stock futures, both of which trended higher in early trading. The Hang Seng Index was the region's standout performer, jumping 2.7% to close at 26,189.79. Gold rose to around \$4,360 per ounce on the first trading day of 2026, extending its bullish momentum from its strongest annual performance in more than four decades.

The South Korean won held steady around 1,440 per dollar on the first trading day of 2026, as investors digested remarks from the BOK Governor Rhee Chang-yong. He said the won remains "misaligned" with economic fundamentals and signaled the central bank's renewed determination to support FX stability. Singapore's economy expanded 5.7% year-on-year in Q4 2025, up from an upwardly revised 4.3% in Q3, marking the strongest growth since the third quarter of 2024, preliminary data showed.

Japan (NKY:IND) market closed. The Japanese yen stabilized around 156.6 per dollar on Friday after two consecutive sessions of losses, though it remained near ten-month lows, intensifying calls for intervention.

Tobacco stocks continue to slide; ITC shares drop over 5%

Shares of cigarette and tobacco product makers ITC, Godfrey Phillips and VST Industries dropped on Friday morning, extending their previous day's decline, after the government imposed an additional excise duty on such products effective February 1.

ITC's stock tumbled 5.11 per cent to Rs 345.35 -- its 52-week low—on the BSE.

The stock of Godfrey Phillips India declined 4.58 per cent to Rs 2,184.60.

Shares of VST Industries also dipped by 2.56 per cent to Rs 248.60.

On Thursday, January 1, Godfrey Phillips India tanked 17.09 per cent to settle at Rs 2,289.65 on the BSE. Shares of ITC tumbled 9.69 per cent to end at Rs 363.95 and VST Industries dipped 0.60 per cent to Rs 255.15.

The finance ministry has notified amendments to the Central Excise Act imposing an excise duty of Rs 2,050-8,500 per 1,000 sticks based on cigarette length, effective February 1. This duty will be over and above 40 per cent GST.

The ministry has also notified the Health and National Security Cess Act, levying cess on the manufacturing capacity of pan masala-related businesses from February 1.

The total tax incidence on pan masala, after taking into account 40 per cent GST, will be retained at the current level of 88 per cent.

The revised tax structure replaces the existing regime of 28 per cent GST, along with a compensation cess on tobacco and related products.



India's manufacturing sector activity falls to 2-year low in Dec

NEW DELHI(TIP)

India's manufacturing sector activity witnessed the weakest improvement in the sector in two years in December on account of softer expansions in new orders, prompting firms to limit input purchases and job creation, a monthly survey said on Friday, January 2.

The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) — an indicator of sector performance — fell from 56.6 in November to 55 in December.

In the PMI parlance, a print above 50 means expansion, while a score below 50 denotes contraction.

"Even with growth momentum easing, India's manufacturing industry wrapped up 2025 in good shape. The sharp rise in



new business intakes should keep companies busy as we head into the final fiscal quarter, and the lack of major inflationary pressures could continue to support demand," said Pollyanna De Lima, Economics Associate Director at

S&P Global Market Intelligence.

The end of the 2025 calendar year was characterised by a loss of growth momentum across several measures tracked by the HSBC India Manufacturing PMI survey. Production growth slowed to a 38-month low amid the weakest upturn in new orders for two years. Part of the slowdown in total sales reflected a softer increase in international orders. New export orders rose to the least extent in 14 months. Where growth was signalled, panellists cited better demand from clients in Asia, Europe and the Middle East.

"We have seen a steady spell of softer growth in new export orders. In fact, the share of companies signalling higher international sales in December was about half of the average for 2025. The

survey's anecdotal evidence has also pointed to a narrower range of export destinations, with goods mainly heading to Asia, Europe and the Middle East," Lima said. A softer increase in new business intakes prompted companies to limit the extent to which inputs were purchased. Moreover, amid a general lack of pressure on operating capacity, factory employment increased only marginally in December.

"The pace of job creation was the lowest in the current period of growth that began in March 2024," the survey said.

On the price front, the survey said input costs rose at a historically negligible pace. Concurrently, the rate of 'charge inflation' eased to a nine-month low.

WEEKLY HOROSCOPE - JAN 5 - JAN 11

By Chirag Daruwalla - Son of Astrologer Bejan Daruwalla



BEJAN DARUWALLA AND CHIRAG DARUWALLA



ARIES

Ganesha says this week, Aries natives will be filled with new energy. After the challenges you have faced recently, you

are now likely to reap the fruits of your hard work. Your ideas will be appreciated at the workplace, which may lead to new responsibilities. Personal relationships will also improve. Spending time with family and friends will make you happy. Your feelings will be respected, and communication will strengthen the relationship. If you are in a relationship, making plans with your partner will be wonderful for you. This week, it is important to focus on health. Include regular exercise and a balanced diet in your routine. Also, do meditation or yoga to maintain mental balance. This is the time to spend some time for yourself and your soul. If you feel the need, you can also plan a short trip, which will give you mental freshness. In short, this week will bring positive energy and opportunities for you. Focus on your goals and maintain a positive attitude.



TAURUS

Ganesha says this week will give mixed results for Taurus natives. There may be an increase in

your work and the beginning of new responsibilities. This is the time for you to make some important decisions towards your livelihood. Your financial condition will remain stable, but you may have to face some unexpected expenses. There may be both joy and tension in relationships. Talking openly with your loved ones and listening to them will help you establish a better relationship. In terms of health, focus on keeping yourself active and positive. Yoga or light exercise will improve your mental and physical health. This weekend will feel like a new beginning. You may get an opportunity to work on a special project or plan, which will give you satisfaction and achievement. You will get the fruits of your hard work.

GEMINI



Ganesha says this week is a time of many possibilities and new experiences for Gemini.

There will be a stir in your social life, you will get an opportunity to meet friends. Talking to people around you will bring new energy and enthusiasm to you. Your communication abilities will be strong at this time, so express the things you want to say with clarity and confidence. There will be a sense of novelty and freedom in



CANCER

Ganesha says this week's prediction for Cancer focuses on your emotions. At this time, you will feel the desire to

spend more time with your family and close ones. This is a good time for you to spend high-quality time with your loved ones. In work life, your hard work will start bearing fruits now. The efforts you have made will be appreciated, and you may also get some new responsibilities. Incorporate creativity in your work, as your latest ideas will get recognition. In terms of health, it is important to take care of your mental and physical well-being. With the help of yoga or meditation, you will feel refreshed. Understand the importance of conversation and express your feelings clearly to maintain harmony in the family. This week, maintain a positive attitude to make your dreams come true. Remember that you will reap what you sow, so pay attention to your thoughts and words.

LEO



Ganesha says this week brings the message of new possibilities and opportunities for Leo natives. Your confidence

will increase and you will be able to understand your abilities better. This week, you will be looking forward to expanding your social circle and making new friends. Your hard work and dedication are likely to bear fruit in the work field. New information or opportunities related to an old project may come to you, which will help you strengthen your position. Be careful and avoid taking any decision in excitement. Try to maintain mutual understanding and harmony in married life. Have a heart-to-heart talk with your partner and try to understand their feelings. This is the time to spend with each other and enjoy good times. Health-wise, take care of yourself. Try doing yoga or meditation to get some physical activity and mental peace.

VIRGO



Ganesha says many positive opportunities will come your way this week. Your hard work and dedication will be rewarded in your workplace, which may give you a chance for promotion or new responsibilities. You will find clarity in your thinking, which will help you make

the right decisions. Social life will also see growth. Meeting old friends or making new contacts will be beneficial for you. Spending time with family and listening to their problems will further strengthen your relationship. In terms of health, it is advisable to focus on regular exercise and a balanced diet. Give priority to mental health; meditation and yoga will give you peace. The most important thing for you this week will be to enjoy small joys and look at life around you with a positive attitude. Hope this week will witness improvement and progress for you.



LIBRA

Ganesha says this week is the time for a new beginning for you, Libra. The search for balance in life has

become more important now than ever. Try to create the right balance between your work and personal life. Some new possibilities may arise in your social life, where meeting old friends or interacting with new people will be very beneficial. This week there will be clarity in your thoughts, so if you are considering any important decision, this is the right time. Trust your inner voice and move forward according to your insights. You will get inspiration this week, so try your hand at creative work. However, you should also take care of your health. Avoid excessive stress and take time to participate in physical activities. Meditation and yoga can help improve your mental health. Your financial matters are also likely to improve but spend wisely. Consider every aspect before investing anywhere. Overall, this week will bring you an opportunity for self-realization and harmony.

SCORPIO



Ganesha says many new possibilities are going to open up for you this week. The time has come to showcase your hidden skills and talents. Your hard work and dedication will be recognized at the workplace, which will boost morale. Relationships will deepen, so try to establish communication with people close to you. Your intuition will be very strong this week, using which you will be able to make the right decisions. An old financial issue is likely to be resolved, which will give you relief. You will feel better in terms of health but try to stay away from any kind of stress. Regular exercise and meditation will help maintain your mental balance. This week is the time for self-reflection and planning. Focus on your desires and goals, as it will help you in your future direction. Be optimistic and face every challenge with enthusiasm and strength.

SAGITTARIUS



Ganesha says this week has brought many opportunities and challenges for Sagittarius natives. Your confidence will increase, which will keep

you motivated to achieve your goals. In the field of work, some new projects may come before you, which will require your creativity. Activity will also increase in social life. Conversations with friends and family will lighten your mind. During this time, there will also be possibilities for new friendships. However, keep in mind to stay away from any kind of dispute, as it can hurt your mental health. From a financial point of view, it is time to be a little cautious while investing. Avoid making hasty decisions and think carefully about financial matters. In terms of health, adding yoga or exercise to your daily schedule will give you energy. Practice meditation to maintain mental balance. The overall message of this week is: move forward with enthusiasm and restraint and use your opportunities properly.



CAPRICORN

Ganesha says this week is a positive and progressive time for Capricorn people. Your hard work and dedication are expected to yield results now. Your commitment and diligence at the workplace will attract your superiors towards you. Your ideas and plans will be recognized, which will increase your confidence. Progress will also be seen in personal relationships. Harmony with family members will remain complete, and you will try to spend more time with each other. You can plan a special event, which will create an atmosphere of happiness and gaiety. There is a need to be cautious in terms of health. You can do meditation or yoga to relieve mental stress. Make sure to take time for yourself, so that you can feel fresh. This week marks the beginning of new possibilities for you. Focus and move forward toward your goals.

AQUARIUS



Ganesha says this week, the door to new possibilities will open for Aquarius people. It is time for you to make a new identity in your social and professional life. You have to have the courage to share your ideas, and your unique perspective will be appreciated. Keep in mind that communication plays an important role in your relationships. Talk openly with your partner and share your feelings honestly. This is the time when you can make your long-term relationship stronger. Take special care of your health this week. Take some time out for exercise and meditation; this will not only help improve your physical condition but also bring mental peace. Be cautious in financial matters and try to avoid unnecessary expenses. If you are thinking of investing, it would be better to consult experts. Overall, this week will be full of challenges as well as opportunities for you. Move forward with positive thinking and courage.

**BIRTHDAY HOROSCOPE : JAN 5 - JAN 11, 2026
BY VEDIC ASTROLOGER NASTUR BEJAN DARUWALLA****JANUARY 5**

Ganesha says that you will constantly desire a respectable, prosperous existence and will want to make a place for yourself both in society and at work. To achieve all your goals and aspirations in life, you will have to work tirelessly and continuously. Matters related to money and property will be good in the coming times. You will be able to increase your wealth by adding a second source of income or a family member who will help you. Your position will improve, and you will get a generous compensation package.

JANUARY 6

Ganesha says that in important matters, you are encouraged not to trust others. Revealing private details will not be in your best interest. The strong influence of a spiritual person will bring significant changes in your life. Your partner and family will understand your concerns and show you love and affection. Long-distance travel, even foreign travel, for some people, will give positive results. You will need to take more responsibility for important tasks at the workplace due to the environment.

JANUARY 7

Ganesha says that everyone will be

mesmerized by your charming nature. You should do your best in your field of endeavor. The energy graph showed a declining trend before suddenly rising. The ideas and opinions of your business plan will probably make your wallet bigger. Be careful of any extra expenses you incur. You will move ahead if you continue to talk about your company. You may experience some pressure to maintain your relationships. You always believe in using your freedom to uplift and bless others.

JANUARY 8

Ganesha says you are about to embark on an adventure that has been in your dreams for a long time. You are a useful and successful resource for your business. Your employees will always be pleased with you wherever you go. When you talk to your blood relatives, you need to be open and expressive. Doing so will avoid all kinds of resentment among family members. Your sensible and practical approach will serve as a role model for others. You have a deep affection for the destitute people.

JANUARY 9

Ganesha says your friends and family will be charmed by your kindness, and at the same time, they will be attracted to

you. There is a possibility of getting favor from the government and the judiciary in the coming times. If someone of the opposite sex suddenly enters your life, your life will take a new and interesting turn. Avoid strangers who are too friendly and give everyone the benefit of the doubt when they ask you for a short-term loan or financial help. Long-standing disagreements will be resolved, and important relationships will play a vital role in improving your financial situation.

JANUARY 10

Ganesha says you will always have faith in yourself and rely largely on the choices you make for yourself. You will be in a good financial position, and you will not need parental encouragement. Actions speak louder than words, which means your actions speak for you. There will be happiness at home, but you may feel stressed due to a slight change in the health of others. Even though you have to spend more time alone, the possibility of an affair at work will help you feel better. This is the time to take advantage of your openness and clear concentration. You can become a good advisor.



**VEDIC ASTROLOGER NASTUR
BEJAN DARUWALLA**

JANUARY 11

Ganesh says that you can change your behavior according to the situation. You spend too much time in your boring job, which gives you very little time to achieve your goals. You have a strong desire for acceptance, and you will make plans to achieve your goals. You need to mold your family's pessimistic attitude into a different one before it is too late. The love and affection of your loved ones towards you will increase day by day. If your medications are unbalanced, you may need to get your health checked again. You constantly ask yourself what more you can do to make your relationship more passionate.

Nastur Bejan Daruwalla is available for astrological consultations. He can be reached at www.bejandaruwalla.com
info@bejandaruwalla.com | +91 81412 34275

CONTD FROM PAGE 40**PISCES**

Ganesha says this week will be very positive and progressive for Pisces natives. You will need to strike a balance between your thoughts and emotions. During this week, people around you will inspire you, and you will get a chance to pursue your creativity. This time is suitable for personal and professional growth. On the work front, it is time to start some new projects. If you are part of a team, your colleagues will appreciate your work and encourage you to give better results. Also, it is the right time to present your ideas. This time will be very good in personal relationships as well. There will be

better coordination with your partner and your relationship will be strengthened. Spending time with family will give you happiness and satisfaction.

In terms of health, take care of yourself and take time to play sports or practice yoga. It is also important to maintain mental balance, so practice meditation.

This week, you will feel self-reliant and experience your inner strengths. Let your spark shine and welcome new opportunities!

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. He is available for consultations on WhatsApp number +91 8141566266 or by email: info@chiragdaruwalla.com

|| SHREE GANESHAY NAMAH ||



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No water for sponsor of terror: India's EAM slams 'bad neighbor' Pak

JANUARY 2, 2026
NEW DELHI (TIP)

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Friday asserted that India "has every right to defend its people against neighbors that persist with terrorism", underlining that no country can expect the benefits of cooperation, including water-sharing, while simultaneously pursuing violence against India.

Speaking at an interaction with students at IIT Madras, Jaishankar, without naming Pakistan, said India's neighborhood challenges were aggravated by the "deliberate, sustained and unrepentant" use of terrorism as state policy by one of its western neighbors.

"India's growth is a lifting tide for the region, and most of our neighbors recognize that if India grows, they grow with us. But when it comes to bad neighbors who persist with terrorism, India has every right to defend its people and will do whatever is necessary. You cannot ask us to share our water with you and also spread terrorism in our country," he said.

Referring obliquely to the Indus Waters Treaty, Jaishankar said good neighborliness could not exist in the presence of decades of cross-border terrorism. "Many years ago, we agreed to a water-sharing arrangement, but if you have decades of terrorism,



India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar speaks during the inauguration ceremony of Global Research Foundation at IIT Madras, in Chennai on Friday, January 2. -Photo / ANI

there is no good neighborliness. If there is no good neighborliness, you don't get the benefits of that good neighborliness. You can't say, 'Please share water with me, but I will continue terrorism with you.' That's not reconcilable," he said.

The minister said while countries could have difficult neighbors, India's case was unique because terrorism had been weaponized as a conscious policy choice. "If a

country decides that it will deliberately, persistently and unrepentantly continue with terrorism, we have a right to defend our people against terrorism. We will exercise that right," he said.

At the same time, Jaishankar drew a sharp contrast between India's approach to "bad neighbors" and its engagement with cooperative ones. With "good neighbors", he said, India had consistently invested, helped and shared resources -- citing vaccine supplies during the Covid pandemic, fuel and food support amid the Ukraine conflict, and nearly \$4 billion in assistance extended to Sri Lanka during its recent financial crisis.

Jaishankar said he had been in Bangladesh earlier this week to represent India at the funeral of former PM Khaleda Zia, underscoring India's continued diplomatic engagement in the region.

"More broadly, our approach to the neighborhood is guided by common sense. With good neighbors, India invests, helps and shares," he said.

The External Affairs Minister also emphasized the importance of clear communication in foreign policy to prevent India's intentions from being misread. "How to prevent people from misreading you is to communicate -- clearly and honestly. If you do that, other countries respect it and accept it," he said.

(Source: ANI)

CONTD FROM PAGE 1

Trump, top Iranian officials...

He offered no evidence to support the allegation, which Iranian officials have repeatedly made during years of protests sweeping the country.

"Trump should know that intervention by the US in the domestic problem corresponds to chaos in the entire region and the destruction of the US interests," Larijani wrote on X, which the Iranian government blocks.

"The people of the US should know that Trump began the adventurism. They should take care of their own soldiers."

Larijani's remarks likely referenced America's wide military footprint in the region. Iran in June attacked Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar after the US strikes on three nuclear sites during Israel's 12-day war on the Islamic Republic. No one was injured, though a missile did hit a structure there.

As of Friday, no major changes had

been made to US troop levels in the Middle East or their preparations following Trump's social media posts, said a US official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive military plans.

(Read full story at
www.theindianpanorama.news)

Marriage to a US citizen no...

Below are the key points

Marriage alone is not enough to secure a US Green Card, warns immigration attorney Brad Bernstein.

Spouses of US citizens are classified as "immediate relatives" and are eligible to apply, but approval is not automatic.

USCIS is applying stricter scrutiny to marriage-based Green Card applications under the Trump administration.

Genuine marriage is the main focus, not just legal documentation.

Cohabitation is crucial: Couples are expected to live together full-time as husband and wife.

Living separately raises red flags, even if separation is due to work, education, or financial reasons.

US immigration officers do not consider reasons for living apart, only whether the couple actually shares a home.

Marriages without daily cohabitation are more likely to face investigations, tough interviews, or denial.

USCIS evaluates the "totality of the relationship" to determine if the marriage was entered in good faith.

Legally valid marriages can still be denied if officials believe the intent was to bypass immigration laws.

Broader immigration tightening includes suspension of the Diversity Visa Lottery and reduced work permit duration.

Married couples living apart are advised to seek legal guidance before filing a Green Card application.

Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem said: "At President Trump's direction, I am immediately directing USCIS (United States Citizenship and Immigration Services) to pause the DV1 program to ensure no more Americans

are harmed by this disastrous program."

UN chief calls on Israel to...

indispensable to life-saving humanitarian work and that the suspension risks undermining the fragile progress made during the ceasefire," his spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said in a statement.

"This recent action will further exacerbate the humanitarian crisis facing Palestinians," he added.

Israel on Thursday suspended 37 foreign humanitarian organizations from accessing the Gaza Strip after they had refused to share lists of their Palestinian employees with government officials.

The ban includes Doctors Without Borders (MSF), which has 1,200 staff members in the Palestinian territories -- the majority of whom are in Gaza.

NGOs included in the ban have been ordered to cease their operations by March 1.

Several NGOs have said the requirements contravene international humanitarian law or endanger their independence. Israel says the new regulation aims to prevent bodies it accuses of supporting terrorism from operating in the Palestinian territories.

On Thursday, January 1, 18 Israel-based left-wing NGOs denounced the decision to ban their international peers, saying "the new registration framework violates core humanitarian principles of independence and neutrality."

A fragile ceasefire has been in place since October, following a deadly war waged by Israel in response to Hamas's unprecedented October 7, 2023, attack on Israel.

In November, authorities in Gaza said more than 70,000 people had been killed there since the war broke out.

Nearly 80 percent of buildings in Gaza have been destroyed or damaged by the war, according to UN data, leaving infrastructure decimated.

About 1.5 million of Gaza's more than two million residents have lost their homes, said Amjad Al-Shawa, director of the Palestinian NGO Network in Gaza

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Paush Purnima: A sacred full moon of purity, devotion, and spiritual awakening

Among the many spiritually significant days in the Hindu calendar, Paush Purnima holds a special place as a festival of inner cleansing, devotion, and sacred resolve. Falling on the full moon day (Purnima) of the month of Paush—usually in December or January—this auspicious occasion marks a transition from material indulgence toward spiritual discipline. Bathed in the serene glow of the winter full moon, Paush Purnima invites seekers to purify the body, calm the mind, and elevate the soul.

Origin and Scriptural Roots

The origins of Paush Purnima are deeply embedded in ancient Hindu scriptures and Puranic traditions. The month of Paush is named after the Pushya Nakshatra, one of the most spiritually nourishing lunar constellations, symbolising growth, sustenance, and divine grace. When the full moon aligns with this sacred period, it is believed that spiritual energies reach their peak.

References to Paush Purnima appear in texts such as the Padma Purana, Skanda Purana, and Narada Purana, which extol the merits of ritual bathing, charity, fasting, and devotional practices on this day. Traditionally, Paush Purnima also marks the beginning of Kalpavas at sacred riverbanks like Prayagraj, where devotees live a life of austerity, simplicity, and continuous prayer for an entire month.

Spiritual Significance of Paush Purnima

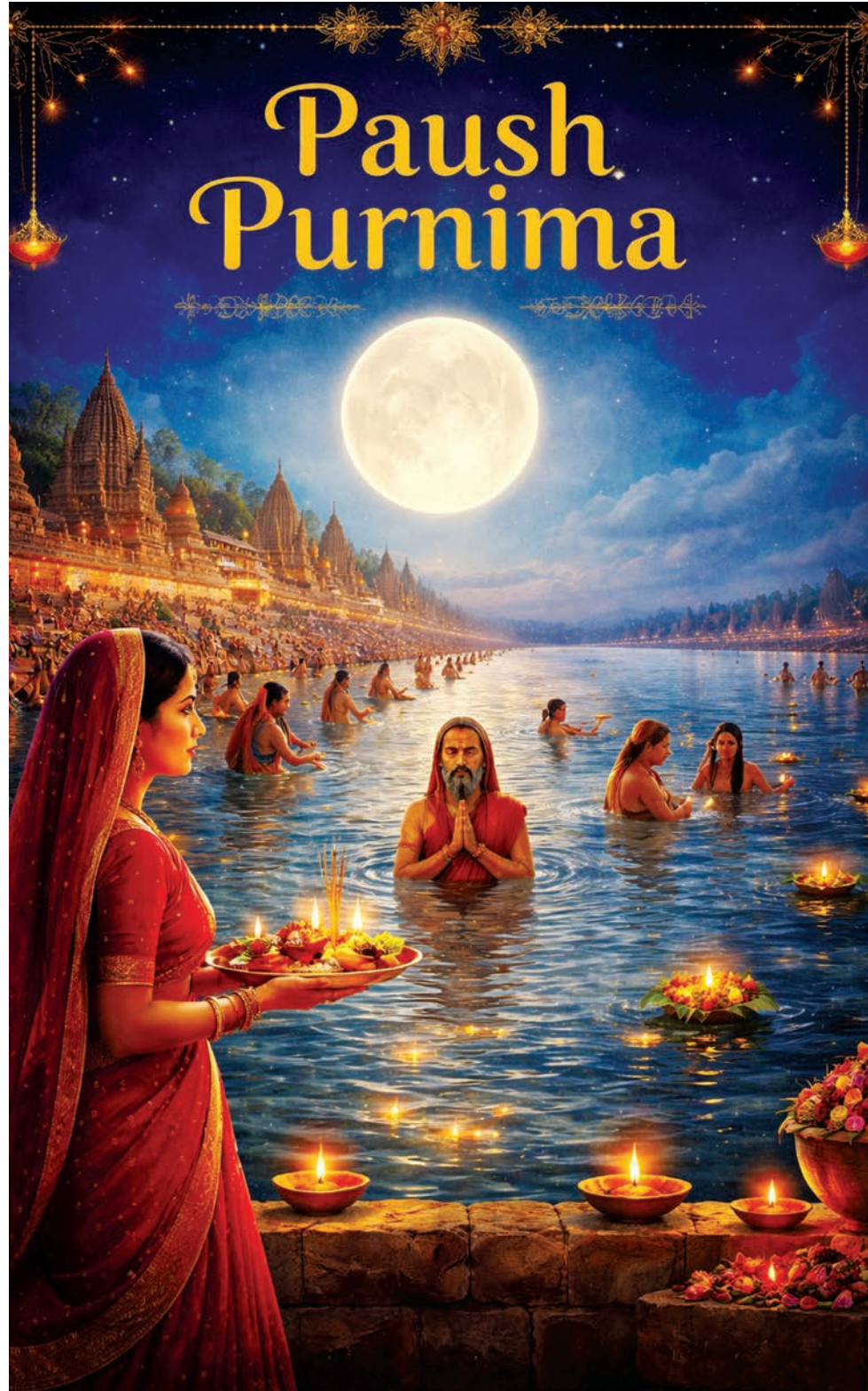
Paush Purnima is primarily associated with purification—both external and internal. The winter season in Hindu thought is considered ideal for spiritual sadhana, as the senses are naturally restrained and the mind more inclined toward introspection. The full moon on this day symbolises completeness, illumination, and the awakening of higher consciousness.

A sacred bath taken at dawn in holy rivers such as the Ganga, Yamuna, Saraswati, Godavari, or Narmada is believed to wash away accumulated sins and negative karmic impressions. Scriptures state that bathing on Paush Purnima yields spiritual merit equivalent to performing great yajnas, as the devotee aligns personal discipline with cosmic rhythms.

Equally important is the act of daan (charity). Offering food, warm clothes, blankets, grains, ghee, or money to the poor and needy during Paush Purnima is said to bring divine blessings, prosperity, and spiritual upliftment. Charity performed in winter, when suffering is more visible, is considered especially meritorious.

Paush Purnima and the Path of Bhakti

From a devotional perspective, Paush Purnima is closely associated with Lord Vishnu and Lord Krishna, the preservers



Important information

Paush Purnima 2026

Saturday, 03 January 2026

**Purnima Tithi starts - 02 January 2026
at 06:53 pm**

**Purnima Tithi ends - 03 January 2026 at
03:32 pm**

of dharma. Devotees observe fasts, recite Vishnu Sahasranama, Bhagavad Gita, or perform Satyanarayan Katha to seek harmony, protection, and spiritual clarity.

The full moon night is also ideal for japa, dhyana, and kirtan, as lunar energy is believed to stabilise emotions and enhance concentration. Many spiritual traditions consider Purnima nights powerful for mantra siddhi and inner awakening.

Kalpavas and Paush Purnima

One of the most distinctive traditions linked with Paush Purnima is Kalpavas, particularly observed at Prayagraj. Beginning on Paush Purnima and concluding on Magh Purnima, Kalpavas involves living by the river in tents or simple shelters, following strict vows of truth, celibacy, non-violence, minimal food, and constant remembrance of the divine.

Kalpavas symbolises a temporary renunciation of worldly comforts to rediscover spiritual priorities. It is believed that sincere observance of Kalpavas purifies lifetimes of karma and brings the seeker closer to moksha.

Symbolism of the Paush Full Moon

The Paush Purnima moon shines in the cold winter sky with a gentle, soothing brilliance. Spiritually, this represents inner illumination amid life's austerities. Just as the moon reflects the sun's light, the human soul reflects divine consciousness when cleansed of ego, desire, and distraction.

The chill of the season reminds devotees of discipline, restraint, and endurance—qualities essential for spiritual growth. Paush Purnima thus teaches that true warmth comes not from external comforts, but from inner devotion and self-awareness.

A Day of Renewal and Sacred Resolve

In essence, Paush Purnima is not merely a ritualistic observance but a spiritual invitation—to pause, purify, and realign life with dharma. It encourages individuals to let go of accumulated impurities, renew vows of righteousness, and cultivate compassion through charity and service. As the full moon rises on Paush Purnima, it illuminates not just the night sky but the spiritual path ahead, reminding humanity that even in the coldest season, the light of devotion, discipline, and divine grace can guide the soul toward peace and liberation.

Sikkim: Himalayan jewel of nature, spirituality and sustainable travel

Tucked away in the eastern Himalayas, Sikkim is one of India's most enchanting destinations—small in size, yet vast in natural beauty, cultural depth, and spiritual calm. With snow-capped peaks, emerald valleys, pristine lakes, ancient monasteries, and a deeply eco-conscious way of life, Sikkim offers a travel experience that feels both intimate and transformative. It is not merely a place to visit, but a landscape to feel, absorb, and remember.

A Land Sculpted by Nature

Sikkim's geography is dramatic and breathtaking. Dominated by the mighty Mount Kanchenjunga, the third-highest peak in the world, the state unfolds in layers of alpine forests, rhododendron-covered hills, glacial lakes, and cascading waterfalls. From subtropical lowlands to icy high-altitude deserts, the diversity of terrain within a few hundred kilometers is astonishing.

Places like Yumthang Valley, often called the "Valley of Flowers," burst into colour during spring, while Gurudongmar Lake, one of the highest lakes in the world, stuns visitors with its icy blue stillness. Rivers such as the Teesta and Rangeet carve their way through the mountains, adding rhythm and life to the landscape.

Gangtok: The Cultural Heart

The capital city Gangtok blends tradition with modernity effortlessly. Clean, organised, and surprisingly cosmopolitan, it offers panoramic views of the Himalayas alongside bustling markets, cafés, and cultural centres. The MG Marg promenade is the city's social hub, lined with shops, eateries, and a relaxed mountain vibe. Gangtok is also home to significant spiritual sites such as the Enchey Monastery and the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, which preserves rare manuscripts, thangkas, and artefacts that chronicle Tibetan Buddhism and Sikkim's royal past.

Monasteries and Spiritual Heritage

Sikkim is deeply rooted in Buddhist traditions, and its monasteries are both spiritual sanctuaries and architectural marvels. The iconic Rumtek Monastery, seat of the Karmapa lineage, stands as a symbol of Tibetan Buddhism outside Tibet. Pemayangtse Monastery, one of the oldest and most sacred in Sikkim, offers sweeping views of the Himalayas and a profound sense of peace.

Prayer flags fluttering in the wind, the rhythmic chanting of monks, and the scent of incense lend Sikkim a meditative atmosphere that appeals to spiritual seekers and travellers alike.

North Sikkim: Raw, Remote, and Majestic

North Sikkim represents the state in its most untouched form. Snowbound



villages like Lachen and Lachung serve as gateways to surreal landscapes. Here, nature dominates, and human presence feels humbling. Roads wind through rugged terrain, opening up to frozen lakes, high mountain passes, and endless skies. This region is ideal for travelers seeking solitude, adventure, and a deeper connection with the natural world.

Adventure and Eco-Tourism

Sikkim is a paradise for adventure enthusiasts. Trekking routes such as the Goecha La Trek offer close-up views of Kanchenjunga and pass through forests, meadows, and glacial terrain. River rafting on the Teesta, mountain biking, paragliding, and yak safaris add excitement for thrill-seekers.

Equally important is Sikkim's commitment to sustainable tourism. As India's first fully organic state, Sikkim prioritises environmental protection, bans plastic bags in many areas, and promotes eco-friendly travel practices. Homestays, community tourism, and responsible trekking are encouraged to preserve the fragile Himalayan ecosystem.

A Mosaic of Cultures and Festivals

Sikkim's population is a harmonious blend of Lepchas, Bhutias, and Nepalis, each contributing to the state's rich cultural fabric. This diversity is reflected in local customs, architecture, music, and festivals.

Celebrations such as Losar, Saga Dawa, Pang Lhabso, and Dasain are marked with vibrant rituals, masked dances, and communal feasts. These festivals offer visitors a rare glimpse into Sikkim's living traditions and spiritual worldview.

Cuisine: Simple, Warm, and Soulful

Sikkimese cuisine mirrors its climate



and culture-comforting, wholesome, and flavourful. Dishes like momos, thukpa, phagshapa, gundruk, and sel roti are staples, often prepared with locally sourced, organic ingredients. Fermented

foods and warm soups are common, reflecting the region's Himalayan heritage. Food in Sikkim is not about extravagance but nourishment, hospitality, and balance.

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History This Week

JAN 2 - JAN 8

JANUARY 2

January 2, 1942 - During World War II in the Pacific, the Japanese captured the Philippines capital of Manila and the nearby air base at Cavite.



January 2, 1960 - In Washington, D.C., Senator John F. Kennedy announced his intention to seek the Democratic presidential nomination.

JANUARY 3



January 3, 1946 - An Englishman known during World War II as "Lord Haw Haw" (William Joyce) was hanged for treason in London. Joyce had broadcast Nazi propaganda via radio from Germany to Britain during the war.

January 3, 1959 - Alaska was admitted as the 49th U.S. state with a land mass almost one-fifth the size of the lower 48 states together.

January 3, 1961 - President Dwight D. Eisenhower broke off diplomatic relations with Cuba two years after Communist dictator Fidel Castro had seized power and just weeks before John F. Kennedy was inaugurated as the next president.

January 3, 1990 - Manuel Noriega, the deposed leader of Panama, surrendered to American authorities on charges of drug trafficking after spending 10 days hiding in the Vatican embassy following the U.S. invasion of Panama.

January 3, 1993 - President George Bush and Russian President Boris Yeltsin signed the Start-II (Strategic Arms Reduction Talks) Treaty, eliminating about two-thirds of each country's long range nuclear weapons.

JANUARY 4



January 4, 1974 - President Richard Nixon rejected subpoenas from the Senate Watergate Committee seeking audio tapes and related documents.

Birthday - Louis Braille (1809-1852) was born in France. Blinded as a boy, he later invented a reading system for the blind using punch marks in paper.

JANUARY 5

January 5, 1925 - Nellie Tayloe Ross of Wyoming became the first female governor inaugurated in the U.S.



January 5, 1968 - Alexander Dubcek became first secretary of Czechoslovakia's Communist Party. He introduced liberal reforms known as "Communism with a human face" which resulted in Soviet Russian troops invading Prague to crack down.

January 5, 1972 - President Richard Nixon signed a bill approving \$5.5 billion over six years to build and test the NASA space shuttle.

January 5, 1976 - In Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge led by Pol Pot announced a new constitution which legalized the Communist government and renamed the country as Kampuchea. During the reign of Pol Pot, over 1 million persons died in "the killing fields" as he forced people out of the cities into the countryside to create an idyllic agrarian society. Educated and professional city people were especially targeted for murder and were almost completely annihilated. In January of 1979, the Pol Pot was overthrown by Cambodian rebels and Vietnamese troops.

Birthday - King Juan Carlos I of Spain was born in Rome on January 5, 1938. He was chosen by Francisco Franco to inherit his right-wing dictatorship and was sworn in as King on November 22, 1975, two days after Franco's death. The new King then announced his intention to mold Spain into a broadly based democratic society.

JANUARY 6



January 6, 1941 - President Franklin Roosevelt delivered his State of the Union address to Congress asking for support for the lend-lease program aiding Allies fighting the Axis powers. Roosevelt also defined four essential freedoms worth defending; freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear.

January 6, 1990 - Poland's Communist Party disbanded and then reorganized as the Social Democratic Party, an opposition party to Solidarity.

January 6, 2021 - In Washington, D.C., thousands attended a "Save America Rally" near the White House at the Ellipse, a park located south of the White House grounds. There, President Donald Trump and others addressed the crowd to express opposition to the certification of the Electoral College results of the 2020 presidential election which would finalize Joe Biden as the victor. Events

escalated when several hundred departed the rally and advanced toward the United States Capitol building. They breached security perimeters and entered the Capitol building, thereby disrupting the joint session of Congress convened to certify the election results. The incursion led to the evacuation and secure sheltering of Congress members, staff, and Vice President Mike Pence. The ensuing chaos included vandalism, theft of government property and violent confrontations with law enforcement, resulting in numerous injuries to law enforcement and civilians, overall including five fatalities. The unprecedented breach led to a lockdown of the Capitol and the deployment of the National Guard and other law enforcement agencies to restore order. The events were widely condemned by political leaders from both major parties and led to a nationwide discussion about political rhetoric, security, and the state of democracy in the United States. In the aftermath, numerous individuals were arrested and charged for their roles in the events. The House of Representatives impeached President Trump for the second time on January 13, charging him with "Incitement of Insurrection," though he was later acquitted by the Senate.

Birthday - Joan of Arc (1412-1431) was born in France. After a series of mystic visitations by saints, she inspired French troops to break the British siege at Orleans and win several important victories during the Hundred Years' War (1337-1453) between France and Britain. She was eventually captured and sold to the British who tried her for heresy and burned her at the stake. In 1920, Joan of Arc was canonized a saint by the Roman Catholic Church.

JANUARY 7



January 7, 1989 - Emperor Hirohito of Japan died after a long illness. He had ruled for 62 years and was succeeded by his son, Crown Prince Akihito.

January 7, 1999 - The first presidential impeachment trial in 130 years began as members of the U.S. Senate were sworn in by Supreme Court Chief Justice William Rehnquist to decide whether President Clinton should be removed from office. House prosecutors had delivered two articles of impeachment charging Clinton with perjury and obstruction of justice.

January 7, 2021 - At approximately 3:40 a.m. local time, under heightened security, the U.S. Congress certified the Electoral College results of the 2020 presidential election, officially confirming Joe Biden as the President-elect. This action followed a tumultuous day whereby protesters had breached the Capitol causing to a temporary halt of the electoral count.

Birthday - Millard Fillmore (1800-1874) the 13th U.S. President was born in a log cabin in Cayuga County, New York. He

was a Whig who became president upon the sudden death of Zachary Taylor in 1850 from cholera. Best remembered for signing five bills concerning slavery known as the Compromise of 1850 which temporarily prevented civil war in the U.S. He was not re-nominated by his party.

JANUARY 8

January 8, 1815 - The Battle of New Orleans occurred as General Andrew Jackson and American troops defended themselves against a British attack, inflicting over 2,000 casualties. Both sides in this battle were unaware that peace had been declared two weeks earlier with the signing of the Treaty of Ghent ending the War of 1812.



January 8, 1918 - Amid the ongoing World War in Europe, President Woodrow Wilson proposed his Fourteen Points, calling for a reduction of arms, self determination for governments, and the creation of a League of Nations, all intended to serve as a basis for resolving the conflict and establishing a lasting peace in Europe.

January 8, 1959 - Charles de Gaulle took office as the first president of France's Fifth Republic. De Gaulle had led the Free French government in exile during Nazi occupation. Following the war, he advocated a strong presidency to balance the powerful National Assembly. He was chosen to head the new government following years of political instability in which no French government was able to stay in power for more than a few months. On this day in 1966, he took office for a second term.

January 8, 1964 - President Lyndon Johnson declared War on Poverty during his State of the Union message before Congress.

January 8, 1982 - The American Telephone and Telegraph (AT&T) Company was broken up as a result of an antitrust suit. AT&T gave up 22 local Bell system companies, opening the U.S. telephone system to competition.

January 8, 1987 - The Dow Jones industrial average first topped the 2,000 mark.



Birthday - Elvis Presley (1935-1977) was born in Tupelo, Mississippi.

New Zealand ODIs: Siraj, Pant's ODI future in focus

NEW DELHI (TIP)

The indefatigable duo of Rishabh Pant and Mohammed Siraj is expected to be the big talking point on Saturday when the selectors pick a 15-member Indian ODI squad for a three-match series against New Zealand starting January 11 in Vadodara.

While no major shake ups can be foreseen in the squad that beat South Africa in a preceding series a few weeks ago, two specific concerns could be addressed by the Ajit Agarkar-chaired selection committee.

The first point could be Pant's position as the second wicketkeeper with Ishan Kishan showing his hitting prowess in the middle order for Jharkhand and Dhruv Chand Jurel also smashing a 'Daddy Hundred' for UP in the domestic circuit.

Whether it is Agarkar or head coach Gautam Gambhir, both have shown an inclination to select personnel based on team combination.

Therefore, in T20 Internationals, they have gone for keepers who are openers in Sanju Samson and Kishan.

In ODIs, the same keeper is needed to primarily be a middle-order batter, coming in at No.5 or 6.

To be fair to Pant, since the arrival of Gambhir as head coach, he has played just one ODI between July 2024 to December 2025.

Only 31 ODI games in eight years with an average of less than 35 isn't a true reflection of the resilient Rourkee man's potential.

In terms of impact, even his greatest detractors would agree that he is scores over Kishan and Jurel.

However, his shot selection in the recent lost Guwahati Test against South Africa neither impressed the head coach nor the selection committee. But dropping him without giving a fair run could also raise a few uncomfortable questions.

The second aspect to be discussed is the selection of pacers for the three-match series.

While Hardik Pandya and Jasprit Bumrah are likely to be rested keeping the T20 World Cup in mind, it will be interesting to see if the selectors opt to give a break to the other two speedsters — Harshit Rana and Arshdeep Singh.

Both played in the recent series against South Africa.

But Siraj, who wasn't picked for the Champions Trophy



based on conditions, played in the away series against Australia before being overlooked for the South Africa assignment. He hasn't played in the first four rounds of the ongoing Vijay Hazare Trophy either but might appear for Hyderabad in two of the last three rounds.

His omissions from the 50-over set up after being a regular feature till the 2023 World Cup, has been baffling.

In case of Mohammed Shami, he has played for Bengal across formats but there is a school of thought that he is past his prime as far as international cricket is concerned.

The communication between Shami and the selection committee has also not been particularly clear.

Among the Vijay Hazare Trophy performers, two genuine contenders are Sarfaraz Khan (for the number four slot) and Devdutt Padikkal (opener).

However, with Shubman Gill, Rohit Sharma and Yashasvi Jaiswal already guaranteed a place, it will be difficult to fit in Padikkal.

Sarfaraz Khan has been brilliant in the domestic circuit but Ruturaj Gaikwad has already surged ahead of him among contenders with a hundred against South Africa.

In the end, all selection debates would be nothing more than a storm in the tea cup if the five wise men decide to maintain status quo.

Drop Bangladesh pacer Mustafizur Rahman from IPL squad: BCCI directs KKR

The BCCI has asked Kolkata Knight Riders to release Bangladesh pacer Mustafizur Rahman from its squad ahead of the Indian Premier League's 2026 edition amid the growing strain in bilateral ties between the two countries.

KKR had acquired the services of the 30-year-old left-arm for Rs 9.20 crore from a base price of Rs 2 crore after an intense bidding war with Chennai Super Kings and Delhi Capitals at the players' auction last month. The BCCI said KKR will be allowed to name a replacement player if required.

"The BCCI has asked Kolkata Knight Riders to release Mustafizur Rahman from its squad. They can ask for replacement, if needed. And upon request, BCCI will allow a replacement player," BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia told PTI here on Saturday.

Asked why the BCCI has asked Kolkata Knight Riders to do so, he replied, "Because of recent developments all across." The pressure had been mounting on the BCCI over the participation of the Bangladesh cricketer amid recent killing of a Hindu man in the country and India's expression of concern for the safety of minorities there.

Shah Rukh Khan, co-owner of the IPL franchise, also found himself at the centre of the controversy surrounding Rahman's signing. Several political leaders had criticised the decision, citing alleged atrocities against Hindus in Bangladesh.

Sjoerd Marijne named head coach of Indian women's hockey team

NEW DELHI (TIP)

Hockey India (HI) on Friday, January 2, announced the appointment of Sjoerd Marijne as the head coach of the Indian women's hockey team. The Dutchman replaces Harendra Singh, who reigned last month due to "personal reasons".

Marijne returns to the Indian setup after a historic performance at the Tokyo Olympic Games in 2021 when the team finished fourth in only their second appearance at the quadrennial event in more than 36 years.

He will be supported by Matias Vila as analytical coach. Vila is a former midfielder from Argentina who made his international debut in 1997 and competed in the 2000 Sydney and the 2004 Athens Olympics for Argentina. He has been involved in coaching over the past two decades.

Also making his return to the Indian hockey setup is Wayne Lombard, as scientific advisor and head of athletic performance. He will be supported by Rodet Yila and Ciara Yila, both in the role of scientific advisors.

On his return to India, after a stint



between 2017 to 2021 where the Indian women's team rose in world ranking making it to top 10, Marijne said: "It's great to be back. After 4.5 years, I return with fresh energy and a clear vision to support the team's growth and help the players achieve their full potential on the world stage."

Marijne's first big challenge as chief coach will be the FIH World Cup Qualifiers

in Hyderabad from March 8-14. Marijne will arrive in India on January 14 while the national coaching camp begins on January 19 in SAI, Bengaluru.

Speaking about his appointment, HI president Dilip Tirkey said, "We welcome Sjoerd Marijne, and the entire support staff to the Indian hockey family. We extend our gratitude to the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (MYAS) and

Sports Authority of India (SAI) for expediting the appointment in order to ensure the team's preparations for the upcoming World Cup Qualifiers is not hampered. Emphasis has been laid on fitness of the team which was one of the key reasons for Indian women's historic performance in Tokyo. We look forward to a fruitful stint."

Marijne's last stint with the team was from 2017 to 2021, and he will be supported by Matias Vila as analytical coach. Meanwhile, South African Wayne Lombard also returns to the side, as scientific advisor and athletic performance head.

Marijne is credited with changing the belief of the women's hockey team in India. He changed hope to expectation, which led to them putting in better performances. Before him, India would employ a defensive approach, but after his arrival, it began to attack first, even if it meant defeat. Also, conceding an early goal didn't lead to panic.

He also focused on fitness and physical conditioning, which was key to his tactical shift to high press and compact defence.



An Eye Institute in Rajahmundry, Andhra Pradesh combating avoidable blindness in children.

On behalf of all my colleagues of the Wilmer Eye Institute in Baltimore, MD. I send my best wishes and congratulations to our friends in Goutami on this extremely important occasion. This beautiful facility will match the wonderful world class work of your doctors, nurses, and staff in preserving and restoring the vision of so many patients. We in the United States are inspired by your dedication and admire your tireless efforts to serve so many who need your skills and compassion.

Best Wishes, Peter



Peter J McDonnell, MD Director Wilmer Eye Institute, Johns Hopkins



New Goutami Institute to be constructed 2024



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