



FOG - Holiday Toy Giveaway at Fremont Temple

► Details on page 16



What Rashmika is most proud of in 9-years

► Details on page 36

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This week's question

Will Indo-US relationship improve in 2026?

Last week's result

Are Bangladeshis in India safe after the Hindu lynchings?

YES 38% NO 62%

## INDIA BOARDS REFORM EXPRESS

India has boarded the Reform Express: PM Modi

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi said, India has emerged as the center of global attention due to the innovative zeal of the country's people as he listed the reforms undertaken by his government, especially this year.

"Today, the world sees India with hope and confidence. They appreciate the manner in which the pace of progress has been accelerated with next-generation reforms, which are cross-sectorial and amplify the nation's growth potential," the Prime Minister wrote in an article published on LinkedIn.

"I have been telling many people that India has boarded the Reform Express. The primary engine of this Reform Express is India's demography, our young generation, and the indomitable spirit of our people," he said.

PM Modi further stated that 2025 will be remembered as a year for India when it focused on reforms as a continuous national mission, building on the ground covered over the past 11 years. The country modernized institutions, simplified governance, and strengthened the foundations for long-term, inclusive growth.

► Details on page 5



File Photo: PM Modi waves the national flag as he visits the Chenab bridge, in Jammu and Kashmir (Narendra Modi Photo Gallery/ANI Photo)



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# INDIA BOARDS REFORM EXPRESS

## India has boarded the Reform Express: PM Modi

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi said, India has emerged as the center of global attention due to the innovative zeal of the country's people as he listed the reforms undertaken by his government, especially this year.

"Today, the world sees India with hope and confidence. They appreciate the manner in which the pace of progress has been accelerated with next-generation reforms, which are cross-sectorial and amplify the nation's growth potential," the Prime Minister wrote in an article published on LinkedIn.

"I have been telling many people that India has boarded the Reform Express. The primary engine of this Reform Express is India's demography, our young generation, and the indomitable spirit of our people," he said.

PM Modi further stated that 2025 will be remembered as a year for India when it focused on reforms as a continuous national mission, building on the ground covered over the past 11 years. The country

has been replaced with the modern and simple Income Tax Act, 2025, bringing unparalleled relief for the middle class, the Prime Minister observed.

Together, these reforms mark India's move towards a transparent, technology-driven tax administration, he added.

Mentioning the reform boost to small and medium businesses, the Prime Minister highlighted that the definition of "small companies" has been expanded to include firms with turnovers up to Rs 100 crore. This will result in reducing the compliance burdens and associated costs for thousands of companies.

The reform to permit 100 percent FDI in Indian insurance companies will give a fillip to insurance penetration and security for the people. Apart from enhanced competition, it would offer better insurance choices and improved service delivery for the people, he contended.

PM Modi further stated that the Securities Market Code Bill has been introduced in Parliament. It will enhance governance

*"We moved ahead decisively...with higher ambition, faster execution and deeper transformation. The reforms have been about enabling citizens to live with dignity, entrepreneurs to innovate with confidence and institutions to function with clarity and trust"*

modernized institutions, simplified governance, and strengthened the foundations for long-term, inclusive growth.

"We moved ahead decisively...with higher ambition, faster execution and deeper transformation. The reforms have been about enabling citizens to live with dignity, entrepreneurs to innovate with confidence and institutions to function with clarity and trust," he said.

Citing a few examples of the reforms that his government has undertaken, PM Modi said that GST 2.0 has been implemented as a clean two-slab structure of 5 percent and 18 percent. This has eased the burden on households, MSMEs, farmers and labor-intensive sectors. The purpose is to ensure dispute reduction and better compliance.

This reform has boosted consumer sentiment and demand. Sales have grown in the festive season, he pointed out.

Citing other decisions, he said that, in a first, individuals earning up to Rs 12 lakh a year faced no income tax at all.

The obsolete Income Tax Act of 1961

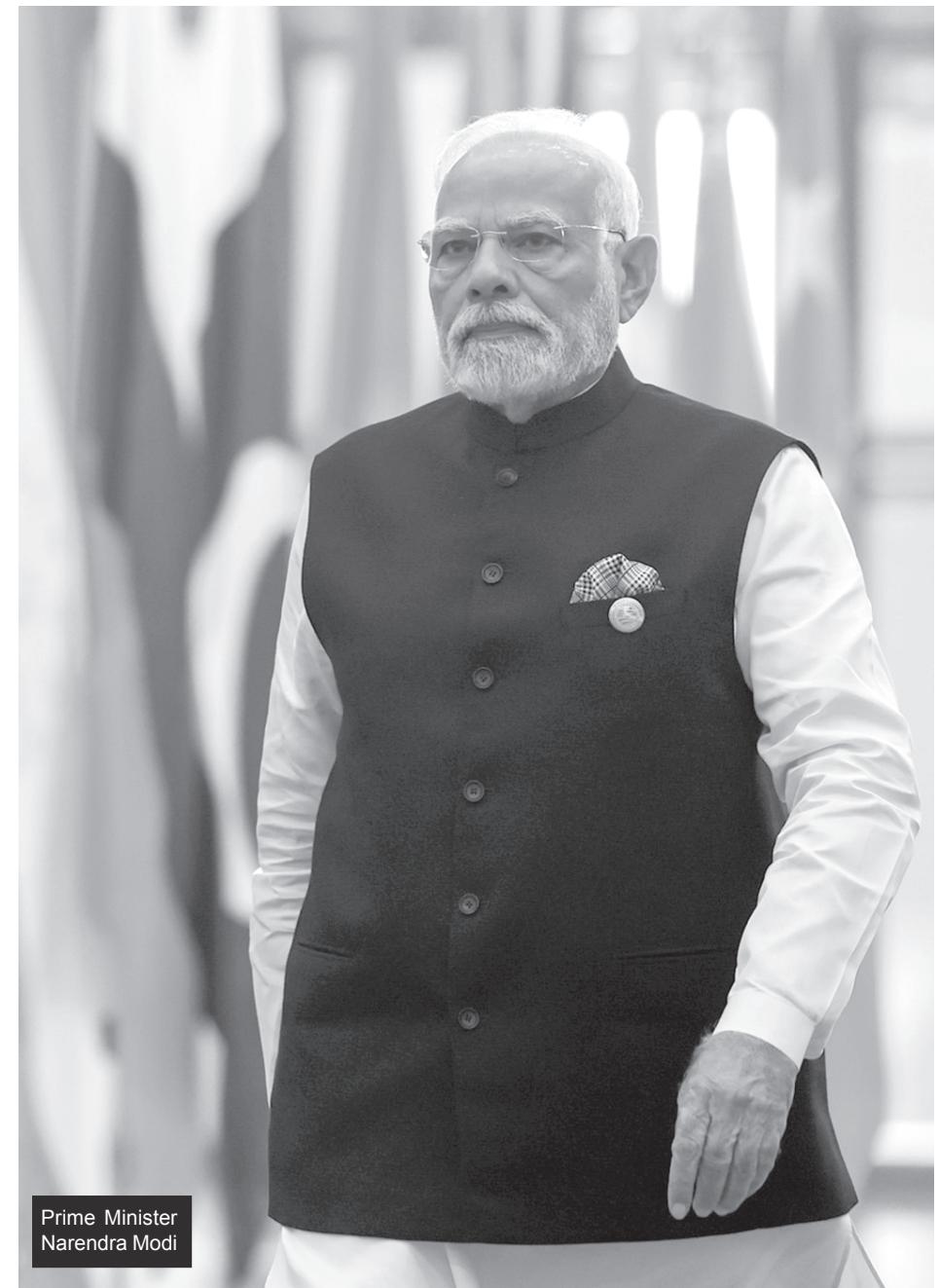
norms in the SEBI, also enhance investor protection, reduce compliance burden and enable a technology-driven securities market for a Viksit Bharat, he added.

He also highlighted that in a single Parliament session, the Monsoon Session, five landmark maritime legislations were passed: the Bills of Lading Act, 2025; the Carriage of Goods by Sea Bill, 2025; the Coastal Shipping Bill, 2025; the Merchant Shipping Bill, 2025; and the Indian Ports Bill, 2025.

These reforms simplify documentation, make dispute resolution easier and reduce logistics costs. Outdated Acts dating back to 1908, 1925 and 1958 have also been replaced, he said.

PM Modi also drew attention to Jan Vishwas, which ended the era of criminalization with the scrapping of hundreds of outdated laws. As many as 71 Acts have been repealed through the Repealing and Amendment Bill, 2025.

He further highlighted that to boost ease of doing business, a total of 22 QCOs were revoked across synthetic fibers,



Prime Minister Narendra Modi

yarns, plastics, polymers, and base metals, while 53 QCOs were suspended in various steel, engineered, electrical, alloy, and consumer end product categories, covering a broad spectrum of industrial and consumer materials.

This will increase India's share of apparel exports; lower production costs in diverse industries like footwear, automobiles, and ensure lower prices for domestic consumers for electronics, bicycles and automotive products, PM Modi said.

Citing the historic labor reforms, PM Modi said labor laws have been reshaped, merging 29 fragmented laws into four modern codes as part of the reforms process.

India has created a labor framework that secures the interests of workers while boosting the business ecosystem. The reforms focus on fair wages, timely payment of wages, smoother industrial rela-

tions, social security and safer workplaces. They ensure greater female participation in the workforce. Unorganized workers, including contract workers, are brought under the ESIC and EPFO, expanding the coverage of the formal workforce, PM Modi pointed out.

The Prime Minister also highlighted the trade deals inked with New Zealand, Oman, and the UK. These will add to investments, boost job creation and also encourage local entrepreneurs. They reinforce India's position as a trusted and competitive partner in the global economy. The FTA with the European Free Trade Association, comprising Switzerland, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein, has been operationalized. This marks India's first FTA with developed European economies, he added.

# A year of strains, signals and slow repair for India-US partnership

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

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

***The optics mattered. They were noticed across capitals.***

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

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

***That phase did not last long.***

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

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

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

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



File photo of Prime Minister Narendra Modi with U.S. President Donald Trump, at The White House in Washington, DC (ANI Photo)

earlier years was missing.

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

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

Senior US officials, including some from Trump's Cabinet and inner circle, went public. They criticized India by name. Some went further. They accused New Delhi of funding Russia's war in Ukraine through energy purchases.

India did not respond publicly. There was no war of words. But the tension was real. Indian officials made their position clear. Energy security and strategic au-

tonomy were not negotiable.

***India's outreach to China also drew attention.***

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

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

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

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

described the access as unexpected.

The unease deepened months later. Munir returned to Washington. This time, he joined Pakistan Prime Minister Shehzad Sharif for a meeting in the Oval Office. In New Delhi, the optics was seen as a setback. The engagement revived long-standing concerns about US dealings with Pakistan's military leadership.

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

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

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

***Trade also had its own story.***

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

In December, cooperation took a visible turn. The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) launched a US satellite into space. The mission underscored a reality often missed in political debates. High-technology collaboration between the two countries remained intact. India's Ambassador to the US, Vinay Mohan Kwatra, was invited to Mar-a-Lago.

People-to-people ties, however, have come under pressure this year. As restrictions on H-1B visas tightened and new visa rules were issued, Indian professionals in technology, healthcare, and research felt the impact. Processing and visa appointment delays increased. Hundreds of families have been left in limbo.

Students from India - who account for among the largest number of foreign students - too were impacted by this. Uncertainty in visas disrupted their admissions and academic plans. *IANS Year Ender 2025*

# Guyana invites Indian companies to bid in oil blocks auction in 2026

VISHU ADHANA

NEW DELHI: Seeking to diversify players in its fast-growing energy sector, Guyana has invited Indian companies to participate in the exploration and production of crude oil, with oil blocks slated for auction in 2026.

Speaking to ANI recently, Guyana High Commissioner Dharamkumar Seeraj expressed optimism that energy ties between the two countries will grow in the coming years, while noting that Guyana supplied nearly six million barrels of crude oil to India in 2025.

This statement comes at a time when India is actively working to diversify its energy supply chains, geopolitical uncertainties, and US sanctions linked to purchases of Russian oil.

Guyana's oil sector is booming, transforming the small South American nation into a major global player after massive offshore discoveries in the Stabroek Block, with production soaring past 800,000 barrels per day (bpd) in late 2025 and aiming for 1.7 million bpd by 2030.

When asked about growing energy ties with India, the High Commissioner said, "Guyana wants to diversify its economy. I foresee that our relationship with India will expand in the area of trade

Highlighting India's growing interest, Seeraj said Indian companies are not only potential buyers of Guyanese crude but could also play a role in upstream activities.

panies involved in drilling, we expect that private sector companies, which are single companies in India, will express an interest, not only in purchasing crude, but also in the extraction of oil," he added.

A second offshore oil block auction is expected to be held in 2026, following Guyana's first auction launched in 2022, under which six companies were awarded eight blocks in 2023.

"It is our hope, speaking from Guyana's perspective, it's our hope that we will attract a wide cross section of investors in the oil and gas sector coming from different countries, and quite frankly, we'll be very happy if Indian companies show up," Seeraj added.

Besides hydrocarbons, the South American country is looking to expand co-operation with India in infrastructure, education, renewable energy and digital sectors. Seeraj noted that Indian companies are already active in road construction, transportation infrastructure and renewable energy projects in the country. ANI



of oil and gas already this year; a total of 6 million barrels of crude oil were sent to India. And I see a significant increase in the coming years."

"India has shown that interest, and India, of course, needs a lot of oil as a country to send more and more oil to India itself. And as we get more and more com-

## आप कड़ी मेहनत करते हैं। इसलिए, हम आपके लिए स्वास्थ्य योजना ढूँढ़ना आसान बनाते हैं।

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# Lankan envoy praises India's support during Cyclone Ditwah, says "PM Modi important voice of Global South"

NEW DELHI: Sri Lanka High Commissioner to India, Mahishini Colonne heaped praise on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's exemplary leadership and highlighted India's extensive support to the island nation during the recent Cyclone Ditwah.

She described PM Modi as "an impor-

times of difficulty. During the Easter Sunday attacks in April 2019, when Sri Lanka was shattered, and travel advisories were issued, Prime Minister Modi visited within six weeks, which greatly helped restore tourism and boost our economy."

On India's role during Cyclone Ditwah,

*"For us, Prime Minister Modi is seen as an important voice for the Global South and in the international arena. He is a highly respected leader and is regarded by the people of Sri Lanka as a dear friend, having consistently stood by Sri Lanka in times of difficulty"*

tant voice of the Global South" and "a highly respected leader," while commanding India's swift and multidimensional assistance in the cyclone aftermath.

Speaking to IANS, she said, "For us, Prime Minister Modi is seen as an important voice for the Global South and in the international arena. He is a highly respected leader and is regarded by the people of Sri Lanka as a dear friend, having consistently stood by Sri Lanka in

the High Commissioner explained, "India rushed in immediately within hours to help Sri Lanka in multidimensional ways. During the rescue operations, relief, and medical assistance, India deployed helicopters, sent relief supplies, and dispatched doctors, making its support to us multidimensional. As I explained, India is standing with Sri Lanka in the next phase of rebuilding and recovery as well. And this is not the first time that

India has done this."

Sharing further details on the post-cyclone situation, saying, "The cyclone has passed, and the relief and rescue operations have now ceased. Basic services and connectivity have been restored, and India has provided significant assistance to Sri Lanka, as you are probably aware."

"Operation Sagar Bandhu commenced while the cyclone was still in force, immediately following the cyclone's strike on Sri Lanka, and we have now moved to the next phase. The Government of Sri Lanka has released emergency funding, and people who have lost infrastructure and housing are in camps," she added.

Highlighting India's long-standing partnership with Sri Lanka, Colonne said, "India has definitely emerged as a trusted, confident, and consistent partner for Sri Lanka time and again, and so I can speak for Sri Lanka. The people of Sri Lanka see India as a trusted partner, which stands up for us and has consistently stood in the past."

She also touched upon trade relations, noting, "As you probably know, India and

Sri Lanka signed a free trade agreement way back in 1998. That was the first free trade agreement between the two countries. Since then, our trade partnership has grown. Now, for Sri Lanka, India is the



Sri Lanka High Commissioner to India, Mahishini Colonne

largest trading partner, but the FTA needs to be upgraded, and we are hopeful that discussions on that will commence soon." /ANS

## Minorities in Pakistan face discrimination violence, legal constraints: Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's persecution of religious minorities has again drawn global attention amid an entrenched pattern of discrimination, violence, and institutional neglect, a recent report said.

Citing observers, a report in Khalsa Vox highlighted how minorities in Pakistan - including Hindus, Christians, Sikhs, Ahmadis and others - continue to face social marginalization, targeted attacks, and legal restrictions that curtail their freedom to practice religion openly and safely.

"Incidents of forced conversions, attacks on places of worship, and misuse of blasphemy laws have been repeatedly reported, contributing to an atmosphere of fear and insecurity"

*"Incidents of forced conversions, attacks on places of worship, and misuse of blasphemy laws have been repeatedly reported, contributing to an atmosphere of fear and insecurity"*

about the country's commitment to protecting minority rights."

According to the report, while Pakistan continues to raise concerns over minority rights in other countries, critics contend that such statements fail to address its own internal problems and are used to

deflect attention from domestic human rights violations at home.

"Rights advocates argue that meaningful improvement in Pakistan's minority protections would require legal reforms, stricter enforcement against hate crimes, and a broader societal shift toward tolerance and inclusion. Until then, they say, Pakistan's abysmal record on safeguarding its minorities is likely to remain a recurring subject of international concern and criticism," the report noted.

Pakistan's abysmal record on safeguarding its minorities is likely to remain a recurring subject of international concern and criticism," the report noted.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) categorically rejected Islamabad's remarks on violence against minorities in India, highlighting Pakistan's abysmal record of persecuting religious minorities.

## 293 killed in mob attacks in Bangladesh since Yunus took over: Rights group

DHAKA: A leading human rights organization in Bangladesh highlighted widespread rights abuses across the country, including mob violence, extrajudicial killings, deaths in custody, minority persecution, killings in political violence, and suppression of press freedom, local media reported.

In its latest report, Dhaka-based Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK) revealed that "mob terrorism" has increased at an alarming rate throughout 2025.

As per the findings, mob violence claimed 197 lives from January to December in comparison to 128 deaths last year.

Since the Muhammad Yunus-led interim government assumed office in 2024, the report said, at least 293 people have been killed in mob violence.

"People have been beaten and killed without any evidence, investigation or legal process, by creating suspicion and rumors. In the name of the Tawheed Janata, mobs have been illegally formed to van-

dalize art and cultural centers, attack the Baul community -- and even burn bodies from graves. There have been incidents of harassment of people of opposing views, including freedom fighters," Bangladeshi Bengali daily Prothom Alo quoted the rights body as saying.

*As per the findings, mob violence claimed 197 lives from January to December in comparison to 128 deaths last year*

According to the statement, in many of these incidents, the law enforcement agencies failed to act, and efforts to bring perpetrators to justice were largely absent.

The report said that at least 107 people died in various prisons across the country in 2025, including

69 inmates and 38 prisoners. Among the prisons across the country, Dhaka Central Jail recorded the highest number of deaths with 38, followed by Gazipur with 7, while the remaining fatalities occurred in other prisons across the country.

Additionally, at least 38 people were killed in extrajudicial killings in 2025, as reported by the monitoring of the Information Protection Unit of ASK. /ANS

# India has boarded the Reform Express: PM Modi

Cont'd from page 5

The Prime Minister also stated that the SHANTI Act is a transformational step in India's clean-energy and technology journey. It ensures a strong framework for the safe, secure and responsible expansion of nuclear science and technology, and enables India to meet the rising energy demands of the AI era, like powering data centers, advanced manufacturing, green hydrogen and high-technology industries.

It also promotes the peaceful application of nuclear technologies in healthcare, agriculture, food security, water management, industry, research and environmental sustainability, supporting inclusive growth and improved quality of life; opens new pathways for private sector participation, innovation and skill development; and creates opportunities for India's youth to lead in frontier technologies and next-generation energy solutions, PM Modi said.

This is an opportune moment for investors, innovators and institutions to partner with India, to invest, innovate and build a clean, resilient and future-ready energy ecosystem, he said.



(An exclusive picture from the Yearend 2025) Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Chinese President Xi Jinping, and Russian President Vladimir Putin in conversation at the venue of the Shanghai Cooperation Council (SCO) Summit, in Tianjin. (DPR PMO/ANI Photo)

The Prime Minister further stated that Viksit Bharat- G RAM G Act, 2025, Rozgar Guarantee framework raises employment guarantee from 100 to 125 days.

This will result in increased spending towards strengthening village infrastructure and livelihoods. The aim is to turn rural work into a means to ensure higher

incomes and better assets.

PM Modi also mentioned that the Education Reforms Bill has been introduced in Parliament, and a single, unified higher education regulator will be established.

Multiple overlapping bodies like the UGC, the AICTE, and the NCTE will be

replaced with the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan.

What makes the reforms of 2025 significant is not only their dimension but also their underlying philosophy. Our Government has prioritized collaboration over control and facilitation over regulation in the true spirit of a modern democracy, he observed.

The Prime Minister further stated that these reforms were designed with empathy, recognizing the realities of small businesses, young professionals, farmers, workers and the middle class. They were shaped by consultation, guided by data and anchored in India's constitutional values.

"These reforms are aimed towards building a prosperous and self-reliant India. Building a Viksit Bharat is the pole-star of our development trajectory. We will continue pursuing the reform agenda in the coming years," he added.

The Prime Minister urged everyone in India and abroad to deepen their bond with the India growth story.

"Keep trusting India and investing in our people!" he said. /ANS

## India's centrality in Indo-Pacific a strategic prize that must be continuously earned: Report

NEW DELHI: India is no longer a peripheral player in the affairs of Indo-Pacific but is becoming the fulcrum upon which regional stability and prosperity relies. India's centrality in the Indo-Pacific is a strategic prize that must be continuously earned through investment in maritime capabilities, diplomatic engagement and economic integration, a report has detailed.

India's rise in the Indo-Pacific is driven by three factors - the need to counterbalance China's assertive regional posture, the opportunity to position itself as preferred alternative for democratic and like-minded countries and the economic need for integrating into supply chains and trade networks beyond its traditional South Asian neighborhood, a report in India Narrative mentioned.

*India's rise in the Indo-Pacific is driven by three factors - the need to counterbalance China's assertive regional posture, the opportunity to position itself*

fulcrum upon which regional stability and prosperity depend. This transformation represents far more than a shift in diplomatic positioning - it reflects a fundamental realignment of global power dynamics where New Delhi's agency and strategic vision have become indispensable to shaping the future of the world's most economically vibrant and strategically contested region," it added.

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) comprising India, the United States, Japan, and Australia, showcases New Delhi's transformed role. Despite being part of the Quad, India continues to maintain strategic autonomy by not making military com-

mitments while still benefiting from enhanced security cooperation, technology transfer, and coordinated initiatives that increase its regional capabilities without compromising its independent foreign policy trajectory.

Maritime strategy is the backbone of India's Indo-Pacific vision. /ANS

## DRDO successfully conducts salvo launch of two 'Pralay' missiles in quick succession

NEW DELHI: The Defence Research & Development Organisation (DRDO) successfully conducted a salvo launch of two 'Pralay' missiles in quick succession from the same launcher off the coast of Odisha.

Defense Minister Rajnath Singh has commended DRDO, the Indian Air Force, the Indian Army, DPSUs, and industry for the successful launch of the missiles in quick succession.

The successful completion of the salvo launch of the Pralay missile has established the reliability of the missile, he said.

According to a statement from the Ministry of Defense (MoD), the flight test at about 10:30 hrs was conducted as part of user evaluation trials. Both missiles followed the intended trajectory and met all flight objectives, as confirmed by tracking sensors deployed by the Integrated Test Range at Chandipur. The terminal events were confirmed by telemetry systems installed onboard ship, deployed near the impact points.



'Pralay' is an indigenously developed solid propellant quasi-ballistic missile employing state-of-the-art guidance and navigation to ensure high precision. The missile is capable of carrying multiple types of warheads against various targets.

The missile has been developed by Research Centre Imarat, Hyderabad, in collaboration with other DRDO laboratories (Defence Research and Development Laboratory, Advanced Systems Laboratory, Armament Research and Development Establishment, High Energy Materials Research Laboratory, Defence Metallurgical Research Laboratory, Terminal Ballistics Research Laboratory, Research & Development Establishment (Engineers) and Integrated Test Range), Development-cum-Production Partners (Bharat Dynamics Limited & Bharat Electronics Limited) and other Indian industries.

As per the MoD, for the tests, the systems were integrated by the two development-cum-production partners. /ANS

WASHINGTON: A federal judge in California has directed US immigration officials to justify the detention of an Indian national after finding his legal challenge credible enough to proceed.

The order was issued on December 24 by the US District Court for the Southern District of California, which asked the government to respond to a habeas corpus petition filed by Naveen. Naveen, an Indian citizen is contesting the legal basis of his continued immigration detention.

In his order, the judge said the petition shows sufficient potential merit and should not be dismissed at an early stage. Under federal rules, a habeas petition may move forward as long as it raises a legally cognizable claim and does not plainly show that the petitioner is not entitled to relief.

Court records state that Naveen, a citizen of India, entered the United States on April 18, 2023, from Mexico without inspection. He was apprehended by Customs and Border Protection shortly after crossing the border and was later released on an Order of Release on Recognizance.

On the same date, immigration authorities issued him a Notice to Appear in immigration court, charging him as an alien present in the United States without admission or parole.

According to the petition, Naveen was arrested by Immigration and Customs Enforcement on November 3, 2025, during a pre-scheduled ICE check-in. ICE has concluded that he is subject to mandatory detention under section 1225(b)(2)(A) of the Immigration and Nationality Act and is therefore ineligible for release on bond. *IANS*

# Immigration POST

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These new rules outline a range of practices that the DHS said raised red flags during recent filing cycles, including wage manipulation

## US targets alleged manipulation in H-1B system under new rule

WASHINGTON: The US government has cited concerns related to manipulation and abuse in the H-1B visa system as a key driver behind its decision to overhaul how visas are selected each year.

The Department of Homeland Security, in a federal notification this week, asserted that the changes were needed to strengthen "process integrity" and preserve fairness in the cap-subject H-1B program.

These new rules outline a range of practices that the DHS said raised red flags during recent filing cycles, including wage manipulation, inconsistent job information, and the filing of multiple registrations tied to related entities.

Making a strong case, the DHS asserted that the amendments aim to reduce incentives for employers to game the system and to ensure that selections reflect legitimate job offers rather than strategic filings.

One concern flagged in public comments was the potential for employers to inflate wages on paper to improve selection chances. DHS said the rule includes safeguards to discourage such behavior and promote consistency between registrations and final petitions.



The department also pointed to risks of manipulation involving job locations. Some commenters warned that listing higher-paying locations during registration, while intending to place workers elsewhere later, threatens the system's credibility.

DHS said it would focus on

*The Department of Homeland Security, in a federal notification this week, asserted that the changes were needed to strengthen "process integrity" and preserve fairness in the cap-subject H-1B program*

consistency between the information submitted during registration and the details provided in the full petition, including job duties, wage levels, and work locations.

Another issue raised involved the use of multiple registrations for the same worker, the DHS said, adding that it related to entities filing separate registrations for a single beneficiary, distorting selection outcomes and weakening trust in the process.

The final rule reinforces certi-

fication requirements and outlines consequences for inaccurate or misleading filings. DHS said this is intended to deter abuse and reduce unnecessary strain on adjudication resources.

While the department dealt with concerns regarding manipulation of job classifications under the Standard Occupational Classification system, several commenters warned that employers could strategically select job codes to justify higher wages without showing real job duties, according to the federal notification.

The rule was intended to furnish a clearer legal standard and reduce ambiguity, helping both employers and regulators understand compliance expectations, it said, and noted that it is limited to changes within existing H-1B regulations and does not add new environmental, tribal, or federalism impacts requiring additional review.

The department maintained that the revised process would improve transparency while preserving access to high-skilled workers.

The H-1B program, capped annually by Congress, has faced repeated scrutiny over fraud, fairness, and enforcement as demand for visas continues to far exceed supply.

US immigration authorities have increasingly relied on regulatory changes rather than legislation to address weaknesses in the system during stalled reforms on Capitol Hill. *IANS*

### "Could have stayed in Mumbai": US influencer mocks death of Indian-origin man in Canada

WASHINGTON: Racist and derogatory social media posts by American influencer Andrew Branca have triggered widespread outrage following the death of an Indian-origin accountant, Prashant Sreekumar, in Canada after allegedly waiting more than eight

hours for medical care at an Edmonton hospital.

Reacting to reports on the death of Prashant Sreekumar, Andrew Branca took to X to mock the incident, referring to the deceased as "another Indian invader of Canada." In the same post, he claimed, "I note that she

and her husband could have easily avoided the shitty Canadian healthcare by staying in Mumbai and enjoying the shitty Indian healthcare," while also sharing an unsourced graph showing net immigration to Canada from 1952 to 2025.

Branca's X bio states that he

is an attorney offering "pro-America, pro-Constitution, pro-Western civilization political and legal analysis." However, a review of his past posts shows repeated use of abusive language against India and Indians. He has previously referred to Indians as "retards" and "third-world," la-

beled Indian food as "disgusting," and stated that "America is for Americans."

In a separate post aimed at Indian migrants, Branca wrote, "You, an Indian national, fled the shit hole of third-world India to live in first-world Canada. *ANI*

## Indian American group seeks action against online threats amid H1-B visa debate

WASHINGTON: An Indian American advocacy group warned this week that online posts targeting the community could lead to real-world harm as it urged social media platforms and law enforcement agencies to intervene before tensions escalate.

The Indian American Advocacy Council (IAAC) said in a series of public statements that recent online rhetoric crossed the line from political debate into incitement, putting members of the community at risk.

"This is not 'politics' or 'edgy speech,'" the group said in a statement posted on social media. "It is incitement,

*The group called on the FBI and other law enforcement agencies to review the public activity of an individual it accused of promoting violence, including examining any possible coordination, funding sources or networks that may be amplifying threats*

and it puts real people at risk."

The group called on the FBI and other law enforcement agencies to review the public activity of an individual it accused of promoting violence, including examining any possible coordination, funding sources or networks that may be amplifying threats. The council also urged the social media platform X to remove content that advocates violence and to suspend repeat offenders.

"Threats against an ethnic community are not acceptable. Not online. Not anywhere," the group said.

The warning followed a spike in online exchanges tied to debates over US immigration policy, particularly the H-

## Registered foreigners living in South Korea hit 1.6 million in Nov

SEOUL: The number of foreigners staying in South Korea for 90 days or longer for work or study has exceeded 1.6 million as of November, with about half of them living in the greater Seoul area, recent data showed.

The figure, which came in at 1.1 million in 2021 and 1.3 million in 2023, has been on the rise, according to the monthly data compiled by the justice ministry. It marked an 8 percent increase from November last year.

By area, 54 percent of registered foreigners were residing in the greater Seoul area, with 54,584 living in Hwaseong, 42,158 in Siheung and 38,398 in Ansan, which are all located in southern Gyeonggi Province, reports Yonhap news agency.

By nationality, 29.8 percent were Chinese, followed by 18.4 percent who were from Vietnam, 5.5 percent from Nepal, 4.3 percent from Uzbekistan and 4.1 percent from Cambodia.

Registered foreigners refer to foreigners who have applied to stay in South Korea for 90 days or longer. They are eligible to receive foreign registration cards and have to report within 14 days should they change their area of residence. IANS

1B visa program, which allows American companies to hire foreign workers in specialty occupations. Critics of the program have long argued it undercuts US workers, while supporters say it is essential for filling high-skilled jobs.

Rajeev Sharma, a founding member associated with the advocacy council, said what began as a policy discussion had taken a troubling turn.

He wrote that he was "deeply unsettled and frustrated" by what he described as the distortion of a legitimate debate into "something much more sinister," characterizing the rhetoric as dehumanizing and, at times, genocidal in tone.

Other users aligned with the council echoed those concerns, praising Americans who pushed back publicly and calling on X to enforce its rules against violent threats.

In a separate message, the advocacy council thanked people who spoke out in defense of Indian Americans.

"We want to thank EVERY AMERICAN who stood up for Indians in the US," the group said. "Genocidal rhetoric has no place in America."

Alongside its public condemnation of online threats, the council also circulated a draft charter to its members outlining its mission and long-term goals. The document, described as a "prospective IAAC Charter," was presented as a statement of identity and purpose.

"This document is designed to communicate who we are and what we stand for to a broader audience," the message said, urging supporters to share it within their networks.

"The founding members -- Sid, Rajeev, and myself -- are energized every day, and we're deeply grateful for your support and momentum," the message added. "This is just the beginning."

As debates over immigration and economic policy continue ahead of the 2026 election cycle, advocacy groups say they are watching closely for rhetoric that moves beyond disagreement and into language they view as dangerous.

For the Indian American Advocacy Council, the message this week was blunt: policy arguments are legitimate, but calls for harm are not.

In his post, Rajeev Sharma, a co-founder associated with IAAC, framed the broader dispute as a shift from a policy debate into something more hostile.

He wrote that he was "deeply unsettled and frustrated" by the "bastardisation of what started as a legitimate debate" around "whatever little abuse in H-1B policy" into "something much more sinister," describing it as a "proxy surge of dehumanization and genocidal" rhetoric.

Another supporter, Sidharth, praised those who spoke out and pressed X to suspend Matt Forney, writing: "It is HIGH TIME" the platform acts.

Forney, who has drawn criticism in recent months for anti-Indian commentary, triggered a fresh backlash this week after a Christmas Day post that was later deleted, according to multiple media reports. IANS

## Public comments show sharp divide over US wage-based H-1B rule

WASHINGTON: Public comments submitted on the US government's new H-1B visa rule show a sharp split over how the changes could reshape high-skilled immigration and the technology workforce.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) summarized hundreds of submissions received during the rulemaking process in its final rule published in the Federal Register. The comments reflect competing views on whether the H-1B program helps or harms the US economy.

Several commenters stated that H-1B professionals play a crucial role in driving innovation, productivity, and entrepreneurship in the United States. They argued that foreign-born workers make significant contributions to economic growth, particularly in technology and research fields.

Some comments focused on international students. These submissions said limiting job opportunities for graduates of US universities would weaken innovation and reduce the country's global competitiveness.

**Several commenters stated that H-1B professionals play a crucial role in driving innovation, productivity, and entrepreneurship in the United States**

Startups and small businesses featured prominently in many responses. Commenters said these firms are major sources of innovation but often lack the resources to compete with large companies on salaries. They warned that a wage-weighted selection system could shut startups out of the H-1B program.

Several submissions said many breakthroughs come from early-career professionals and research institutions. These commenters cautioned that higher wage thresholds could favor established firms and reduce diversity in innovation.

One commenter said that startups depend on the H-1B program to recruit workers with "niche expertise". The submission warned that the rule would make the program more expensive and harder to use, limiting growth and global leadership in technology.

Other commenters took the opposite view. They questioned claims of a STEM labor shortage and cited studies suggesting the US has more qualified tech workers than available jobs.

Some comments pointed to unemployment data among the recent US graduates in computer science and related fields. They argued that job prospects for domestic workers have weakened even as employers continue to seek H-1B hires. Several submissions said the technology industry has overstated skills shortages. One comment described the US IT labor market as "awash with supply". IANS

# Tharoor backs firm action on illegal immigration, calls border control a government responsibility

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: Congress MP Shashi Tharoor has underscored the government's responsibility to effectively manage India's borders, stating that the presence of illegal immigrants reflected systemic failures that needed to be addressed firmly and lawfully.

Speaking to ANI recently, Tharoor said if people were entering the country illegally or overstaying their visas, it pointed to lapses in border management and immigration controls.

"If illegal immigrants are coming into our country, isn't it our failure? Shouldn't we control our borders better?" he asked, adding that the government was well within its rights to act against such violations. "Indeed, if anyone is illegally in this country or even overstaying a visa, the government has the right to deport them. So let the government do its job on this," he said.

While emphasizing adherence to the rule of law, Tharoor also reiterated the



Congress MP Shashi Tharoor

need for a balanced and humane approach, particularly in sensitive cross-border situations involving political and humanitarian considerations.

Further, the senior Congress leader defended India's decision to allow

Bangladesh's former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to remain in the country, describing it as an act rooted in humanitarian values.

Tharoor said India had acted in the "right humanitarian spirit" by not forcing

her return, noting her long-standing ties with India and her role as a trusted friend of the country over many years.

He noted that matters related to deportation or extradition, were governed by complex legal frameworks, including treaties and exceptions, which required careful review.

"A very small number of people fully understand the legal issues, the treaty obligations and the exceptions within them," Tharoor said, adding that such decisions should be left to the government's considered judgment.

Calling for patience and prudence, he said that offering temporary safety while legal aspects were being studied was both appropriate and responsible. "In the meantime, when we are being hospitable to a good friend, I think we should allow her to remain safely until the government has examined all these issues in much greater detail," he added. ANI

## Trump moves to shut asylum 'loophole': US media

WASHINGTON: The Trump administration is moving to sharply restrict access to asylum by urging US immigration judges to dismiss cases without hearings and redirect migrants to third countries, a shift officials say is aimed at closing what they describe as a "huge loophole" in legal immigration, according to a report by Politico.

The Department of Homeland Security has asked courts to summarily dismiss asylum applications and remove migrants to third countries where they could seek protection, even if they have no prior ties there.

The approach relies on so-called safe third-country agreements negotiated with nations including Uganda, Honduras, and Ecuador, the news outlet reported.

The effort forms part of a broader push to curb immigration and accelerate deportations, as the administration seeks to meet an ambitious annual removal target.

Asylum filings have surged in recent years, with nearly 900,000 claims pending before immigration courts in fiscal year 2024, compared with about 200,000 annually during President Donald Trump's first term.

"Asylum was not designed to provide

people a backdoor way to get to a country of their choosing," a senior administration official was quoted as saying, defending the policy.

"If the United States is confident that they can be successfully removed to another country where they will not be threat-



President Donald Trump

ened, then there's no reason or expectation that they should be allowed to remain here."

The administration's strategy gained momentum in October, when the Justice Department's Board of Immigration Appeals instructed judges to consider third-country removal before weighing asylum claims in the United States.

Following that guidance, DHS attorneys asked judges to dismiss nearly

5,000 cases in November, more than double the figure from October, Politico reported.

Immigration lawyers and advocacy groups say the policy further weakens humanitarian protections built into the US asylum system. "The administration wants to demolish our humanitarian protection system," said Rebekah Wolf of the American Immigration Council. "They do not want to have people have the ability to apply for asylum in the United States."

Administration officials reject that criticism, arguing that individuals with genuine fears of persecution should focus on safety rather than location. "They shouldn't care about what specific location," one official said, adding that disagreements with the law should be taken up in Congress.

The Trump administration has expanded its use of third-country arrangements, including deportations to African nations and a recent deal with Palau to accept a limited number of migrants in exchange for US aid. Supporters of the policy say it restores asylum to its original intent. "It's a way to deter bogus asylum claims," said Mark Krikorian of the Center for Immigration Studies. IANS

## US imposes visa bans on ex-EU commissioner, four others; European Commission seeks clarification

WASHINGTON: The United States has imposed visa bans on a former European Union Commissioner, Thierry Breton, and four other Europeans, accusing them of "organized efforts" to suppress "American viewpoints," Al Jazeera reported.

The US alleged that the five Europeans pressured tech companies to censor free speech.

In a statement, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio alleged that the five Europeans had "advanced censorship crackdowns" against "American speakers and American companies", Al Jazeera reported.

"For far too long, ideologues in Europe have led organized efforts to coerce American platforms to punish American viewpoints they oppose. The Trump Administration will no longer tolerate these egregious acts of extraterritorial censorship," he said on X.

According to Al Jazeera, Sarah Rogers, the undersecretary for public diplomacy, accused Breton of using the EU's Digital Services Act to threaten Elon Musk, the owner of X, ahead of an interview he conducted with United States President Donald Trump during his election campaign.

The European Commission strongly condemned the move, citing freedom of expression. The commission has sought clarification from the US authorities. ANI

## Study finds risk based approach better for breast cancer screening

NEW DELHI: An individualized approach to breast cancer screening that assesses patients' risk, rather than annual mammograms, can lower the chance of more advanced cancers, while still safely matching people to the amount of screening they need, according to a study.

The findings, by the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF), based on a study of 46,000 US women, support shifting the approach to screening from one that is based on age alone to one that starts with comprehensive risk assessment to determine each woman's optimal screening schedule.

"The findings should transform clinical guidelines for breast cancer screening and alter clinical practice," said Laura J. Esserman, director of the UCSF Breast Care Center.

"The personalized approach begins with risk assessment, incorporating genetic, biological, and lifestyle factors, which can then guide effective prevention strategies," Esserman added.

Breast cancer is the most common cancer in women, accounting for an estimated 2.3 million cases and 670,000 deaths globally.

For decades, screening assumed all women have the same risk, and guidelines were based largely on age, despite strong evidence that individual risk varies widely.

The new study, published in JAMA, compared the standard annual mammogram with an approach based on individual risk.

The results showed that the risk-based screening approach did not increase the frequency of higher-stage cancers.

"Shifting resources from lower-risk women to higher-risk women is an efficient, effective approach to screening for and preventing breast cancer," said co-author Jeffrey A. Tice, Professor of Medicine at UCSF.

Importantly, the study found that 30 percent of the women who tested positive for a genetic variant that increased their risk of breast cancer. *IANS*

One can be said to be perfectly healthy in body and mind only if no part of the body or mind makes itself felt. A part makes itself felt only when there is something wrong with it. You know that you have a head only when it aches.

Sri Atmananda (1883 - 1959)

January 2, 2026

www.indiapost.com

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## Eating more vitamin C can physically change your skin: Study

WASHINGTON DC: Scientists discovered that vitamin C from food travels through the bloodstream into every layer of the skin, boosting collagen and skin renewal.

People who ate two vitamin C-packed kiwifruit daily showed thicker, healthier skin. The findings suggest glowing skin really does start from within.

Scientists at the University of Otago, Faculty of Medicine Christchurch Otago, have identified a direct connection between how much vitamin C people eat and how well their skin produces collagen and renews itself.

The findings show that skin health responds measurably to dietary vitamin C, not just topical treatments.

Published in the Journal of Investigative Dermatology, the research found that vitamin C levels in the skin closely mirror levels in the blood (plasma). Increasing intake through vitamin C rich foods was shown to raise both blood and skin concentrations.

### Eating Vitamin C Raises Skin Levels and Thickness

The study followed 24 healthy adults in Aotearoa New Zealand and Germany. Participants who raised their plasma vitamin C levels by eating two vitamin C rich SunGold™ kiwifruit each day showed a clear increase in vitamin C within their skin.

This increase was associated with thicker skin (collagen production) and greater renewal of the outer skin layer.

Lead author Professor Margreet Vissers from Matai Haora -- Centre for Redox Biology and Medicine within the Department of Pathology and Mo-



lecular Medicine described the results as striking.

The strength of the association between skin thickness and vitamin C intake is "compelling," she explained.

### Vitamin C Moves From Blood to Skin

According to Professor Vissers, the relationship between blood vitamin C and skin vitamin C stood out compared to other organs.

"We were surprised by the tight correlation between plasma vitamin C levels and those in the skin this was much more marked than in any other organ we have investigated," she says.

The research team also found that vitamin C circulating in the bloodstream reaches every layer of the skin and supports healthier skin function.

"We are the first to demonstrate that vitamin C in the blood

circulation penetrates all layers of the skin and is associated with improved skin function. I am very proud of my team and excited about what the data is telling us."

### Why Diet Matters More Than Creams

Professor Vissers says the findings reinforce the idea that skin health begins internally, with nutrients delivered naturally through the bloodstream.

Vitamin C is essential for collagen production, which is why it is commonly added to skincare products. However, vitamin C dissolves easily in water and does not absorb well through the outer skin barrier.

The study showed that skin cells are highly efficient at absorbing vitamin C from the blood, with uptake into the outer epidermal layer appearing to be a priority.

### How the Study Was Conducted

The research was funded by a New Zealand company, Zespri International, along with a University of Otago Research Grant, and included two phases.

The first phase examined the relationship between plasma and skin vitamin C levels using healthy skin tissue from patients undergoing elective surgical procedures at Te Whatu Ora Canterbury (with support from the Otago campus's He Taonga Tapu Canterbury Cancer Society Tissue Bank).

The second phase involved a controlled dietary intervention carried out in Christchurch and Germany. Each location included 12 healthy participants.

### Eight Weeks of Dietary Change

Participants were asked to eat two Kiwi Gold kiwifruit daily for eight weeks. This provided the equivalent of 250 micrograms of vitamin C. *ANI*



For detailed stories visit [www.indiapost.com](http://www.indiapost.com)

# Researchers have finally decoded rare cancer-fighting plant compound: Study

LONDON: UBC Okanagan researchers have uncovered how plants create mitraphylline, a rare natural compound linked to anti-cancer effects.

By identifying two key enzymes that shape and twist molecules into their final form, the team solved a puzzle that had stumped scientists for years.

The discovery could make it far easier to produce mitraphylline and related compounds sustainably. It also highlights plants as master chemists with untapped



medical potential.

Researchers at UBC Okanagan have figured out how plants make mitraphylline, a rare natural substance that has drawn attention for its potential role in fighting cancer.

Mitraphylline is part of a small and unusual family of plant chemicals known as spirooxindole alkaloids. These molecules are defined by their distinctive twisted ring shapes, which help give them powerful biological effects, including anti-tumor and anti-inflammatory activity.

For years, scientists knew these compounds were valuable but had little understanding of how plants actually assembled them at the molecular level.

## Solving a Long-Standing Biological Mystery

Progress came in 2023, when a research team led by Dr Thu-Thuy Dang in UBC Okanagan's Irving K Barber Faculty of Science identified the first known plant enzyme capable of creating the signature spiro shape found in these molecules.

ecules and gives us a new way to replicate that process."

## Why Mitraphylline Is So Hard to Obtain

Many promising natural compounds exist only in extremely small quantities within plants, making them expensive or impractical to produce using traditional laboratory methods. Mitraphylline is a prime example. It appears only in trace amounts in tropical trees such as *Mitragyna* (kratom) and *Uncaria* (cat's claw), both of which belong to the coffee plant family.

*Researchers at UBC Okanagan have figured out how plants make mitraphylline, a rare natural substance that has drawn attention for its potential role in fighting cancer*

Building on that discovery, doctoral student Tuan-Anh Nguyen led new work to pinpoint two key enzymes involved in making mitraphylline, one enzyme that arranges the molecule into the correct three-dimensional structure, and another that twists it into its final form.

"This is similar to finding the missing links in an assembly line," says Dr Dang, UBC Okanagan Principal's Research Chair in Natural Products Biotechnology. "It answers a long-standing question about how nature builds these complex mol-

ecules and gives us a new way to replicate that process."

## Toward Greener Drug Production

"With this discovery, we have a green chemistry approach to accessing compounds with enormous pharmaceutical value," says Nguyen. "This is a result of UBC Okanagan's research environment, where students and faculty work closely to solve problems with global reach." *ANI*

## New AI model can predict blood loss in liposuction

NEW DELHI: A newly developed artificial intelligence (AI) model is highly accurate in predicting blood loss in patients undergoing high-volume cosmetic surgery procedures, such as liposuction, according to a study.

While liposuction performed in more than 2.3 million patients per year to remove stubborn fat from the face, abdomen, thighs, arms, or neck is generally safe, excessive blood loss is a potentially serious complication, especially when higher volumes of fat are removed.

The study reported in the Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery journal called the development of an AI model to predict blood loss in liposuction a "groundbreaking advancement" with the potential to improve patient safety and surgical outcomes.

"By leveraging the power of AI-driven

predictive models, surgeons can tailor their interventions to each patient's unique needs, ensuring optimal outcomes and minimizing the risk of complications such as excessive blood loss," said the international research team, including those from



the Department of Public Health, Health Ministry of Ecuador, and Mayo Clinic in the US.

The team used machine-learning technologies to analyze data from 721 patients undergoing large-volume liposuction, with

a total volume of over 4,000 milliliters (four liters) of fat and fluid removed. All procedures were carried out at two clinics, one in Colombia and one in Ecuador, following identical liposuction protocols.

Data from a random sample of 621 patients were used to develop a model for predicting estimated blood loss, incorporating a wide range of demographic, clinical, and surgical data. The researchers then tested their model's performance in predicting the volume of blood loss in the remaining 100 patients.

With 94 percent accuracy, the model was found to help make liposuction safer.

"Such accuracy reinforces the model's potential as a decision-support tool in body contouring procedures, where anticipating intraoperative blood loss is crucial for patient safety and operative planning," the researchers said. *ANI*

## S. Korea reports new bird flu cases at poultry farms, egg prices soar

SEOUL: South Korea has confirmed two additional cases of highly pathogenic avian influenza at poultry farms, bringing the total number of cases this season to 24, officials said recently.

The latest case was found at a chicken farm in the county of Yeongam, 380 kilometers south of Seoul, earlier in the day, which raises about 33,000 chickens, according to the Central Disaster Management Headquarters, reports Yonhap news agency.

On Friday (26 Dec.), the city of Asan, around 85 km south of Seoul, also reported an influenza case at a chicken farm, they added.

Authorities have restricted entry to the farms, and begun culling animals there and investigating the outbreak.

They have also ordered a temporary standstill order on relevant facilities and farming vehicles in the affected areas, the official said.

Meanwhile, egg prices have surged recently, industry data showed raising concerns over potential supply disruptions linked to the spread of highly pathogenic avian influenza.

The average retail price of a carton of 30 large eggs exceeded 7,000 won (US\$4.83) last week, according to the data from the Korea Institute for Animal Products Quality Evaluation. Prices had remained in the 6,000-won range since last month before climbing back above the 7,000-won mark.

Separate data from the statistics ministry showed egg prices rose 7.3 percent in September from a year earlier, outpacing the 5.3 percent increase in overall livestock product prices.

On Wednesday (24 Dec.), the country reported three new cases of highly pathogenic avian influenza, bringing the total number of infections this season to 21.

During the winter season, outbreaks at egg-laying hen farms totaled 11 cases, nearly double the number recorded during the same period last year.

The agriculture ministry said about 3 million egg-laying hens have been culled so far this winter following confirmed outbreaks.

South Korea produces roughly 50 million eggs per day nationwide, and the culling is estimated to have reduced output by about 3 to 4 percent. *ANI*

# PM Modi's message on misuse of antibiotics timely: Experts

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi's message against the misuse of antibiotics is timely and draws attention to antimicrobial resistance (AMR) -- a very important health concern, said health experts recently.

PM Modi, in his last 'Mann Ki Baat' Sunday broadcasts of the year, warned people against the misuse of antibiotics and raised the concern of rising levels of AMR in the country.

The Prime Minister cited a recent alarming report by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), which stated that antibiotics are becoming less effective against diseases such as pneumonia and UTIs in India.

Calling it "extremely worrying", he urged people not to take antibiotics casually.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Mann Ki Baat has brought the attention of the entire country to a very important issue, which is antimicrobial resistance," Rajiv Bahl, Director General of ICMR, told IANS.

"Antimicrobial resistance means that the bacteria that cause infections like pneumonia, urinary tract infections, or sepsis are now not reacting to or are not getting resistant to the antibiotics that we use to treat them. So we all thought earlier

that we could treat any infection because we have antibiotics, but the bacteria are getting more resistant," he added.

Dr. Rajeev Jayadevan, Ex-President of IMA Cochin and Convener of the Research Cell, Kerala, called AMR a serious and silent threat that is looming over our healthcare system.

"It is a scary scenario where antibiot-

ics become ineffective against bacteria. It is particularly important in the context where no new antibiotics are being added to our armamentarium. Since AMR by itself has no obvious symptoms such as pain or cough, most people are unaware of it. The Prime Minister's comments are

much needed to bring it to national attention," he told IANS.

A recent report by the World Health Organization (WHO) showed that about one in three bacterial infections in India were resistant to commonly used antibiotics in 2023. Globally, it was one in six confirmed infections.

National AMR surveillance data also

explosion as several patients in the country were found to carry multiple highly resistant organisms simultaneously.

It showed that more than 80 percent of Indian patients carry multidrug-resistant organisms (MDROs) -- the highest globally.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi's message urging citizens to avoid self-medication and use antibiotics only on a doctor's advice is a timely and powerful public-health intervention. He has brought national focus to AMR -- a quiet but catastrophic pandemic India cannot afford," Dr Neeraj Nischal, Additional Professor in the Department of Medicine at AIIMS, Delhi, told IANS.

The expert explained that AMR does not require new germs; it thrives on bad habits like over-the-counter access, incomplete courses, unnecessary prescriptions, and use for viral illnesses.

"If we treat antibiotics as shortcuts, resistance becomes the long-term cost, paid in lives. Antibiotic misuse today means untreatable infections tomorrow, placing our country at a critical crossroads. Every avoidable prescription writes a future where easy-to-treat infections, routine surgery, childbirth, and cancer care become far riskier," Nischal said. IANS



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Ind-Am led County in Pennsylvania passes rare bipartisan budget

WASHINGTON: An Indian American-headed county in the key swing state of Pennsylvania has unanimously approved its 2026 budget, marking the first bipartisan county budget in nearly a decade, with major investments in housing, public health, infrastructure, and workforce development.

Montgomery County, Pennsylvania's third-largest county with a population of about 865,000, adopted the \$1.2 billion budget last week under the leadership of County Commissioner Neil Makhija, an Indian American who chairs the Board of Commissioners. County officials described the budget as a data-driven effort focused on local needs at a time of political dysfunction at the federal and state levels.

The budget was approved unanimously, reflecting rare cross-party consensus in a politically influential county that is more populous than four US states and Washington, D.C. Montgomery County plays an important role in Pennsylvania, a critical battleground in US elections.

Details on page 18

## US Congressman Krishnamoorthi centers Senate bid on economy

WASHINGTON: Indian American Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi said restoring economic opportunity and holding government accountable is the core of his campaign as he runs for the US Senate.

"The most important issue right now is that the American dream -- the ability of people to fulfill their economic potential -- is slipping from the grasp of millions of people," Krishnamoorthi told IANS in an interview.

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# COMMUNITY ACROSS AMERICA

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January 2, 2026



## FOG - Holiday Toy Giveaway held at Fremont Temple



### RITU MAHESHWARI

India Post News Service

FREMONT, CA: In keeping with the giving 40+ year old tradition and in spirit of holidays, FOG (Festival of Globe) and Fremont Hindu Temple organized a "Holiday Toy and Blanket Drive" on Sunday, December 7th, 2025. This annual Holiday Toy Giveaway at Fremont Temple was held to distribute the toys to needy children including incarcerated youth and destitute kids.

This year there was a record number of Toys and Blankets collect for distribution despite increasing costs and uncertain economy. There was tremendous outpouring of generosity and support among the commu-

nity. Toys were donated to needy and destitute children of Alameda, Marin and other Bay Area counties.

Alameda county juvenile justice system has many such children in its system. The toy collection was organized in the community, local temples and several social events. Devotees generously donated new toys, blankets and funds for a record number of young children to be

supported this Holiday season.

There was tremendous response to FOG's appeal to community for the Toy Drive. Hundreds of people donated the new toys and blankets. The collected toys were delivered to the needy during the holidays. The event was attended by Elected Officials including, Alameda county District Attorney Ursula Jones Dickson; Fremont Mayor Dr. Raj Salwan; County judges supervis-

ing juvenile courts; Representatives from several other Bay Area Counties and, other dignitaries.

Dr. Romesh Japra, Founder and Convener - FOG, in his message said, "We at Festival of Globe and Fremont Hindu Temple have been holding the Toy Drive for past 42 years to spread the joy right from Festival of Lights through Christmas and New Year. Community donating in such large numbers shows that community that cares, also shares to spread the happiness and smiles among the members that need help. Thanks to all the donors of Toys, Blankets and other accessories for needy, destitute, incarcerated, juvenile and other disabled children."

*There was tremendous response to FOG's appeal to community for the Toy Drive. Hundreds of people donated the new toys and blankets. The collected toys were delivered to the needy during the holidays*

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# Indian-American-led County in Pennsylvania passes rare bipartisan budget

WASHINGTON: An Indian American-headed county in the key swing state of Pennsylvania has unanimously approved its 2026 budget, marking the first bipartisan county budget in nearly a decade, with major investments in housing, public health, infrastructure, and workforce de-

velopment. County plays an important role in Pennsylvania, a critical battleground in US elections.

Under the adopted spending plan, \$5.3 million has been allocated to expand housing and homelessness solutions, including new transitional housing across the

safety and economic activity.

The budget also sets aside \$16.6 million to maintain nearly 6,000 acres of parks, trails, and historic sites. These public spaces attract more than three million visitors annually and are considered a central part of the county's environmental and recreational assets.

In addition, more than \$1.5 million has been allocated to support a stronger, fairer county workforce and improve operational efficiency. Officials said the focus is on better employee support and more efficient county operations.

County leaders said the budget remains balanced while incorporating cost-saving measures. Savings were generated through the work of the Office of Innovation, Strategy, and Performance, which identified state and federal grants, reduced redundancies, required vendor competition, and secured philanthropic support. The savings were redirected to priority

community needs.

Makhija, who chairs the Board of Commissioners, oversees the county's budget and approximately 3,000 county employees responsible for infrastructure, public safety, human services, and the criminal justice system.

Before entering elected office, he taught election law at the University of Pennsylvania Law School and represented Pennsylvania counties in litigation against pharmaceutical companies over the opioid crisis. He previously served as executive director of Indian American Impact, a South Asian civic organization focused on civic participation.

Montgomery County officials said the bipartisan budget demonstrates how local governments can deliver results even as broader political debates remain polarized, positioning the county for the year ahead amid economic uncertainty and rising demands on public services. *IANS*



Neil Makhija

development.

Montgomery County, Pennsylvania's third-largest county with a population of about 865,000, adopted the \$1.2 billion budget last week under the leadership of County Commissioner Neil Makhija, an Indian American who chairs the Board of Commissioners. County officials described the budget as a data-driven effort focused on local needs at a time of political dysfunction at the federal and state levels.

The budget was approved unanimously, reflecting rare cross-party consensus in a politically influential county that is more populous than four US states and Washington, D.C. Montgomery

county. Housing affordability and homelessness have emerged as growing challenges in suburban areas surrounding Philadelphia.

Public health and safety initiatives will receive \$7.2 million. The funding is aimed at strengthening emergency communications systems and improving crisis response, areas that county officials identified as key priorities.

Infrastructure accounts for one of the largest portions of the budget. The county has committed \$35 million to maintain and upgrade 131 bridges and 75 miles of roads used by millions of residents and commuters every year. Local officials said the investments are critical to maintaining

## Social worker Raman Nehra donates eyes of late father, sets an inspiring example

### ASHOK KAURA

India Post News Service

PHAGWARA: Renowned social worker Raman Nehra ensured the donation of his late father's eyes, demonstrating exemplary commitment to social responsibility even during personal grief. His respected father, Raj Pal Nehra, passed away on December 16 and was laid to rest at the feet of the Almighty. At the time of his father's demise, Raman Nehra was away in Jammu on professional work, yet he took prompt steps to ensure that the noble act of eye donation was carried out without delay.

Despite being away from home, Nehra coordinated with his family members present in Phagwara, including his sisters Kavita Nehra Kukki and Sarita Chawla alias Radha Nehra, and brother-in-law Rajeev Chawla. He also contacted doctors at Thind Hospital, Jalandhar, to make the necessary arrangements for eye donation. Responding swiftly, a medical team comprising Dr Anisha, Kajal, Nikhil and Chanpreet Singh reached Phagwara and successfully

completed the eye retrieval procedure. The hospital team later honored the family members by presenting them with certificates of appreciation.

Raman Nehra is the General Secretary of Khatri Mahasabha Punjab; an Executive Member of BJP NGO Cell Punjab; State President of Human Rights Council India (Anti-Corruption Cell); District President of Vishva Hindu Sangh Kapurthala; former member of the Khatri

Arora Welfare Board, Punjab Government; State Body Member of Hindu Welfare Board, and Jalandhar Zone In-charge. Widely known for his social service in Phagwara, Goraya and nearby villages, he has consistently motivated



people to pledge and donate eyes after death, resulting in several successful eye donations over the years.

It is noteworthy that Raman Nehra had also donated the eyes of his late mother, reinforcing his lifelong commitment to humanitarian service. His actions continue to inspire society to embrace eye donation as a meaningful way to give the gift of sight to the visually impaired.

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# US Congressman Krishnamoorthi centers Senate bid on economy, accountability

WASHINGTON: Indian American Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi said restoring economic opportunity and holding government accountable is the core of his campaign as he runs for the US Senate.

"The most important issue right now is that the American dream -- the ability of people to fulfill their economic potential -- is slipping from the grasp of millions of people," Krishnamoorthi told IANS in an interview.

He said rising costs have made basic necessities unaffordable for many families. "They're just not able to afford to live," he said, citing groceries, housing, electric-

ity, healthcare, and education.

was compounded by failures in governance. "We have a government that is unaccountable to its citizenry right now," he said. "It's acting with impunity."

He criticized trade and fiscal decisions that he said burden ordinary Americans. "It is basically raising tariffs on everything from everywhere, raising prices for everyone," he said.

He also pointed to healthcare impacts. "It's stripping health insurance for upwards of 17 million Americans," he said.

Krishnamoorthi accused the administration of misplaced priorities. "It's demolishing the east wing of the White House

*"They're struggling in all of those respects, and as a consequence, the American dream is slipping," he said. If elected in the November 2026 elections, Krishnamoorthi, 52, would be the first-ever Indian American and*

*Hindu elected to the US Senate*

ity, healthcare, and education.

"They're struggling in all of those respects, and as a consequence, the American dream is slipping," he said. If elected in the November 2026 elections, Krishnamoorthi, 52, would be the first-ever Indian American and Hindu elected to the US Senate. Primary is scheduled for March 17. He is running for the seat being vacated by Senator Dick Durbin.

Krishnamoorthi said economic stress

and building a golden ballroom," he said, while failing to address serious allegations involving a child sex trafficking ring.

"It fails to produce crucial information with regard to a child sex trafficking ring that might have victimized more than a thousand young women in the early two thousand," he said.

He said such actions reflected broader dysfunction. "It's doing everything wrong right now, and we have to make sure that

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Raja Krishnamoorthi

it's held accountable," he said.

Krishnamoorthi emphasized democratic principles as central to his campaign. "At the end of the day, the people rule this country, not one individual, not one party," he said. "The people ultimately have the power."

The Illinois Democrat has built a na-

tional profile through his work on economic policy, oversight, and foreign affairs.

His Senate bid comes amid heightened debate over inflation, healthcare access, and executive accountability, issues expected to dominate the 2026 election cycle. IANS interview

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Silver, gold show sign of reversal after sharp retreat

MUMBAI: Precious metals showed signs of reversal in domestic market on December 30, after it retreated sharply, with gold and silver falling from record highs in the earlier session.

MCX gold February futures rose 0.59 percent to Rs 1,35,744 per 10 grams, while MCX silver March futures jumped 4.08 percent to Rs 2,33,700 per kg.

In global markets, spot gold fell 4.5 percent on 29 December, to \$4,330.79 an ounce, while US gold futures for February delivery settled 4.6 percent lower at \$4,343.60.

The pullback followed an early surge that saw gold touch \$4,584 per troy ounce and silver climbed to \$82.67 per ounce before both metals failed to hold gains. Analysts attributed the retreat largely



to stretched long positions, a hike in margin requirements by the Chicago Mercantile Exchange (CME) and thin holiday trading that amplified intraday swings.

Safe haven demand of the metals still holds as Russia's President Vladimir Putin told US President Donald Trump that Russia would review its position in peace negotiations after "a Ukrainian drone attack on a Russian presidential residence".

Tighter inventories and liquidity that can evaporate quickly is supporting the rally of silver. Silver does not have a reserve like gold as the London gold market is underpinned by around \$700 billion of bullion that can be lent out in the event of a liquidity squeeze, analysts noted.

"Safe-haven demand stemming from US-Venezuela tensions and renewed Russia-Ukraine hostilities could lend support at lower levels. IANS

# TechBiz POST

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January 2, 2026

## Army Hospital R&R performs India's 1st 3D Flex Aqueous Angiography with iStent

NEW DELHI: The Ministry of Defense said the Ophthalmology Department at the Army Hospital Research and Referral (AHRR) has successfully performed India's first-ever 3D Flex Aqueous Angiography with iStent, combining advanced imaging with minimally invasive glaucoma surgery.

Conducted with the new stand-mounted Spectralis system and a state-of-the-art 3D operating microscope, this pioneering procedure places the Armed Forces Medical Services at the forefront of global ophthalmic care in a landmark achievement for Indian medicine, the ministry said in a statement.

As the first-of-its-kind in the country, the integration of 3D Flex Aqueous Angiography with iStent, a Minimally Invasive Glaucoma Surgery sets a new benchmark in glaucoma care.



*As the first-of-its-kind in the country, the integration of 3D Flex Aqueous Angiography with iStent, a Minimally Invasive Glaucoma Surgery sets a new benchmark in glaucoma care*

For the Armed Forces community, it represents not only a medical milestone but also a strategic leap in safeguarding vision and operational readiness.

Glaucoma, a leading cause

Viksit Bharat has turned into a mass aspiration: PM Modi

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently said the vision of a Viksit Bharat (Developed India) by 2047 has transcended government policy to become a genuine mass aspiration. Addressing a group of eminent economists and experts at NITI Aayog, PM Modi said that this shift is evident in the evolving patterns of education, consumption, and global mobility, necessitating enhanced institutional capacity and proactive infrastructure planning to meet the needs of an increasingly aspirational society. IANS



liver precise, targeted interventions and significantly improve patient outcomes.

In August this year, AHRR became the first government institute in India and the second in South Asia to perform Robotic Custom Laser Cataract Surgery using the state-of-the-art ALLY Adaptive Cataract Treatment System.

The achievement marked the Ophthalmology Department's successful entry into the frontier of robotic, bladeless, and computer-guided eye surgery with its first-ever Femto-second Laser Assisted Cataract Surgery (FLACS).

The integration of this cutting-edge technology at AHRR underscores the Armed Forces' commitment to delivering the most advanced, safe, and effective healthcare for its personnel and their families, said the statement. IANS

## WAVES 2025 boosts the vision of 'Create in India, Create for the World'

NEW DELHI: The 'Waves 2025' event this year witnessed participation from over 90 countries, with more than 10,000 delegates, 1,000 creators, over 300 companies, over 350 startups and an overall footfall of approximately 1 lakh attendees - spanning diverse sectors including broadcasting, infotainment, AVGC-XR, films and digital media, the government said.

This year, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting carried out many important initiatives to support India's media and entertainment sector.

The biggest among them was 'WAVES 2025', the World Audio

Visual and Entertainment Summit, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi describing WAVES not just as an event, but as a "wave of culture, creativity and universal connectivity".

*PM Modi also emphasized India's vision of "Create in India, Create for the World," inviting global investors and youth to engage with India's expansive creative ecosystem*

PM Modi also emphasized India's vision of "Create in India, Create for the World," inviting global investors and youth to

engage with India's expansive creative ecosystem.

According to the ministry, CreatoSphere is an immersive hub of innovation that places creators at the center, trans-

It brought together leading creative minds from India and abroad to foster dialogue, partnerships, innovation, and global showcasing of talent.

Also, CIC Season-I emerged as "India's largest creative talent movement" and achieved unprecedented global reach.

Season-I featured 33 categories, attracted over 1 lakh entries from across India and more than 60 countries, and showcased over 750 finalists across eight creative zones at WAVES, establishing India's largest creator-led challenge platform, the ministry further stated. IANS

forming ideas into experiences across film, VFX, VR, animation, gaming, comics, music, broadcasting, and digital media.

# Economic reforms in 2025 set stage for India's global rise: Economist

NEW DELHI: Economist and former President of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI), Ved Jain, recently said, allowing 100 percent foreign direct investment (FDI) in the insurance sector will prove to be a positive step for India's economy and consumers.

Speaking to IANS, Jain said that in de-

companies will naturally rise, leading to cheaper insurance and services for people," Jain said.

"Lower insurance costs will directly benefit consumers. Additionally, when logistic costs in insurance decrease, competitiveness increases and the overall efficiency of the sector improves," he added.

***"With 100 percent foreign investment, competition between local and foreign companies will naturally rise, leading to cheaper insurance and services for people," Jain said***

veloped countries, FDI in insurance has not created problems; instead, it has increased competition and improved services.

"With 100 percent foreign investment, competition between local and foreign

He also stressed the need to reform outdated colonial-era laws. Jain explained that many laws were created before 1947 to serve British interests, when India was under colonial rule.

Even after more than 75 years of inde-

pendence, several of these laws still exist. He said there is a strong need to move away from such outdated rules, especially those related to minor offences and complex procedures.

As a democratic and welfare-oriented country, India's laws should reflect the expectations of today's society and support citizens rather than burden them.

"Now, over 75 years after independence, there is a need to move away from these colonial rules and reform outdated laws, especially those concerning minor offenses and procedural matters," Jain told IANS.

"Today's society expects this. India is a democracy, and we elect the government, which functions as a social welfare institution. Therefore, laws must be aligned with this perspective," he added.

Commenting on recent economic measures, Jain highlighted three key steps that would support the middle class and busi-

nesses.

He said raising tax-free income to Rs 12 lakh and lowering tax rates for income between Rs 12 lakh and Rs 24 lakh will directly increase disposable income for



the middle class.

"Changes in GST rates, especially reductions from 12 percent and 18 percent to 5 percent on certain goods, will lower prices and improve purchasing power," Jain mentioned. IANS

## 2026 will be a turning point for AI as focus shifts from hype to real-world use: Satya Nadella

NEW DELHI: Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella has said that 2026 will be a crucial year for artificial intelligence, marking a shift from experimentation and excitement to wider, real-world adoption of the technology.

In a blog post, Nadella said the AI industry is moving beyond flashy demonstrations and beginning to separate "spectacle" from "substance" to better understand where AI can deliver meaningful impact.

"The pace of AI development has been extremely fast, but admitted that the ability to use these powerful systems in practical ways has not kept up," Nadella acknowledged.

He described the current situation as a phase of "model overhang", where AI models are becoming more capable than our ability to apply them effectively in everyday life, businesses and society.

"We are still in the opening miles of a marathon," Nadella wrote, noting that while progress has been remarkable, much about AI's future remains uncertain.

"Many of today's AI capabilities are yet to translate into tangible outcomes that improve productivity, decision-making or

human well-being at scale," he said.

Reflecting on the early days of personal computing, Nadella referred to Steve Jobs' famous idea of computers being "bicycles

for the mind", tools that help humans think and work better.

"This idea needs to evolve in the age of AI," he added in the blog post.

"Instead of replacing human thinking, AI systems should be designed to support and strengthen it, acting as cognitive tools that help people achieve their goals more effectively," Nadella mentioned.

According to Nadella, the real value of AI does not lie in how powerful a model is, but in how people choose to use it.

He said the debate should move away from judging AI outputs as either low-quality or highly sophisticated, and instead focus on how humans adapt to working with these new tools in everyday interactions and decision-making.

The Microsoft chief also stressed that for AI to create real impact, the industry must move beyond simply building advanced models.

He said there is a growing need to build complete systems around AI, including software, workflows and safeguards that allow the technology to be used reliably and responsibly.

While AI is advancing rapidly, he admitted that current systems still have rough edges and limitations that need careful management. IANS



## Elon Musk's xAI to expand computing capacity to 2 GW

NEW DELHI: Tesla and SpaceX CEO Elon Musk's xAI company has purchased a third building near its existing Memphis sites in the US, that will bring its artificial intelligence (AI) computing capacity to almost 2 gigawatts (GW).

Elon Musk has already built one data center in Memphis, known as Colossus, and is constructing a second center nearby dubbed Colossus 2, according to multiple reports.

The newly acquired building is in Southaven, Mississippi, and adjoins the Colossus 2 facility, according to reports citing people familiar with the matter.

"xAI has bought a third building called Macrohard," Musk posted on social media platform X, saying it will "take @xAI training compute to almost 2GW."

A gigawatt is enough to provide electricity for about 7,50,000 US homes. Musk has publicly discussed plans to build the world's largest data center for AI training and previously said Colossus 2 will eventually have 5,50,000 chips from Nvidia, costing tens of billions of dollars.

Moreover, Musk's xAI Holdings is reportedly in talks to raise new funding at around \$230 billion valuation. Musk owns a 53 percent stake in xAI Holdings, worth \$60 billion. IANS

**Total investment in real estate at \$3.5 billion in 2025'**

MUMBAI: Private equity investments in India's real estate sector stood at around \$3.5 billion in 2025, a new report said.

According to a latest report by Knight Frank India, investor interest remained steady, with capital flowing into segments offering stable income and lower risk.

As per the report titled 'Trends in Private Equity Investments in India: H2 2025', office assets continued to dominate private equity inflows during the year.

Office real estate attracted 58 percent of the total investments, amounting to \$2 billion, reflecting strong investor confidence in the sector's scale, rental stability and institutional demand.

Investment volumes in office assets remained broadly in line with the three-year average, even as overall capital deployment moderated, the report said.

Residential real estate emerged as the second-largest recipient of private equity investments, accounting for 17 percent of total inflows in 2025.

However, the nature of investments changed significantly. Investors increasingly preferred structured and credit-led deals instead of pure equity investments.

The focus shifted towards downside protection and assured cash flows, with equity participation limited mainly to low-risk projects with clear execution visibility.

Private equity investments slowed during 2025 due to a mismatch between capital costs, asset valuations and exit visibility.

While India's macroeconomic indicators such as GDP growth, inflation and interest rates showed improvement, these factors did not align quickly enough to support aggressive investment activity.

As a result, investors remained selective and cautious, favoring income-focused strategies over large-scale risk capital deployment.

The warehousing sector ranked third, attracting 15 percent of total private equity investments during the year. *IANS*

# Real Estate POST

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January 2, 2026

**Dream of buying Rs 50 lakh homes fades as developers go premium: Report**

NEW DELHI: Affordable housing is rapidly vanishing from India's major cities as real estate developers increasingly shift focus toward premium and luxury projects, forcing lenders to rethink growth strategies in the home loan market, said a report based on Antique Stock Broking's BFSI Conference 2025. *ANI*



For detailed story visit [www.indiapost.com](http://www.indiapost.com)

## Housing sales value in Indian cities jump 6 pc in 2025: Report

NEW DELHI: The overall sales value of housing units in India's top seven cities rose 6 percent to over Rs 6 lakh crore from Rs 5.68 lakh crore in 2025, a recent report said.

The report from real estate services firm ANAROCK showed that sales volumes eased 14 percent to about 3,95,625 units in 2025 from 4,59,645 units in 2024, as hardening property prices, IT sector layoffs, geopolitical tensions and other uncertainties dented demand.

The Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR) recorded the highest sales at approximately 1,27,875 units, down 18 percent, while Pune sold about 65,135 units, down 20 percent.

The two markets together led residential sales in 2025, comprising a 49 percent overall share. Chennai was the only city to post growth in sales volume, surging 15 percent to about 22,180 units.



*The two markets together led residential sales in 2025, comprising a 49 percent overall share. Chennai was the only city to post growth in sales volume, surging 15 percent to about 22,180 units*

"2025 has been a year of broad-spectrum upheaval, including geopolitical turmoil, layoffs in the IT sector, tariff tensions, and other uncertainties," said Anuj Puri, Chairman - ANAROCK Group.

"Sale volumes stabilized at around 4 lakh units across the top 7 cities, but growth in overall

sales value. Over 21 percent of the new supply was launched in the above Rs 2.5 crore price bracket," he said.

Average residential prices across the seven cities rose about 8 percent to around Rs 9,260 per sq. ft, led by a 23 percent jump in Delhi-NCR to about Rs 9,300 per sq. ft., largely due to a higher new supply of pricier homes, the report said.

Out of NCR's total new supply of 61,775 units during the year, over 55 percent were priced over Rs 2.5 crore.

Interestingly, the average residential price growth rate has tapered down from double digits in previous years to single digits in 2025.

The report noted that the sector's performance in 2026 hinges on rate cuts by the RBI and price control by developers. Repo rate cuts leading to lower home loan interest rates can cause demand to revive significantly, it noted. *IANS*

## India's real estate sector raises Rs 17,867 crore in 11 deals in 9 months this fiscal

MUMBAI: The Indian real estate sector witnessed 11 capital market deals and raised Rs 17,867 crore in the first nine months of FY26, as per recent report.

The number of deals in the first nine months of FY26 is already equal to the deals witnessed in FY25 and the amount raised and deals may surpass to become the highest in the past six years, according to the report by Equirus Capital.

The sector overall witnessed fund-raising of Rs 72,331 crore

since FY18 and REITs got the largest share of fund-raising at Rs 31,241 crore, followed by large-cap real estate companies at Rs 20,437 crore, mid-cap real

estate companies at 12,496 crore and small-cap real estate companies at Rs 8,156 crore.

India's real estate story remains strong at the back of



strong economic growth and consumption.

Recent trends indicate upcycle to continue for real estate for the near-term foreseeable future on the basis of increased affordability and investment.

"Home loan rates and rental yields have been steady since FY21 COVID, offering buyers relief. The gap between home loan rates and rental yields are likely to come down to below 500 bps in FY26," according to the report. *IANS*

# Office leasing in India steady at 75.2 million sq ft in 2025, Bengaluru leads

NEW DELHI: Office space absorption across six major Indian cities stood at 75.2 million sq. ft. at year end of CY25, maintaining levels similar to the previous year, a recent report said.

The report from real estate advisory firm Savills India said that Bengaluru, Delhi-NCR and Mumbai emerged as the top three performing markets, collectively

Overall Grade A stock stood at 846.9 million sq. ft. in 2025, with a projected 937.7 million in 2026.

"Despite global uncertainties, India's office market ended 2025 on a firm and resilient note. The momentum was led by new entrants and expansionary demand from GCCs," said Naveen Nandwani, MD, Commercial Advisory and Transactions,

select micro markets, Nandwani added.

City-level data showed Bengaluru led with 20.2 million sq. ft. of gross absorption, followed by Delhi-NCR at 13.6 million and Mumbai at 12.1 million.

The IT-BPM and flexible workspace sectors continued to lead with 33 percent and 15 percent share respectively, in overall leasing. Leasing volumes in Bengaluru



accounting for nearly 61 percent of the gross leasing activity in 2025.

It forecasted that total demand would touch 75 million in 2026, while supply was 58.2 million in 2025 and is expected to rise to 90.8 million next year.

The firm said that leasing figures cover only fresh lease transactions and exclude pre-commitments and lease renewals.

Savills India, said.

Looking ahead to 2026, the market outlook remains positive, driven by GCCs, Technology & BFSI growth, the report said. While a strong supply pipeline could lead to a marginal rise in vacancy levels, it will also provide occupiers with access to high-quality spaces, keeping rental growth largely range-bound, with limited upside in

moderated by around 12 percent YOY, reflecting calibrated occupier expansion decisions and delayed deal closures amid global uncertainty. Chennai, Hyderabad and Pune posted 9.1 million, 11.4 million and 8.8 million respectively. Hyderabad's leasing was significantly driven by GCC deals which accounted for 43 percent of the total gross absorption. IANS

## From Gurugram homes to Noida offices: NCR's real estate story in 2025

NOIDA: Housing emerged as the defining force behind NCR's real estate recovery in 2025, setting the tone for a more measured and grounded market cycle. The year marked a clear shift towards end-user-driven demand, with homebuyers prioritizing delivery certainty, livability and long-term value over speculative gains.

Gurugram remained NCR's housing anchor in 2025, driven by sustained end-user demand in the luxury and upper-mid segments. In H1 2025, Delhi-NCR recorded over 5,100 luxury home sales, with Gurugram contributing the bulk of premium transactions, underscoring its dominance at the top end. Demand stayed concentrated along infrastructure-led corridors such as the Dwarka Expressway, SPR, and Golf

Course Road, as buyers favored larger, amenity-rich and lower-density homes.

Sandeep Chhillar, Founder & Chairman, Landmark Group, says, "2025 has been a remarkable year for the real estate sector, registering impressive growth numbers across the residential and commercial markets in key cities. Within NCR, Gurugram led the growth, particularly in

the luxury housing and Grade-A office segments, benefiting from corridor-led developments along Golf Course Road, Golf Course Extension Road, Dwarka Expressway, and SPR. The city witnessed a steep hike in price appreciation alongside healthy leasing activity for Grade A office space, primarily led by GCCs. The coming year outlook remains positive for the market with sustained demand expected in well-planned micro-markets, continued institutional interest, and infrastructure-led expansion." Shyamrup Roy Choudhury, Founder and Managing Director, Aura World, adds, "In 2025, demand in Gurugram stayed strong without feeling overheated. NewsVoir. ANI



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## India's urban shift creates major opportunity in institutional housing: Brookfield outlook

NEW DELHI: India is emerging as one of the most compelling housing markets globally as rapid urbanization, population growth and changing lifestyle preferences converge to create a significant long-term opportunity for institutional investors, according to the Brookfield 2026 Investment Outlook.

Brookfield notes that while housing is a global theme, the scale and trajectory of India's urban transition make it particularly distinctive.

It noted, "Moving to the Asia-Pacific region, institutional rental housing is in the early stages across many countries. India stands out, with significant population growth and the projected migration of 350 million people to cities by 2050, one of the largest urban shifts in history."

This demographic transformation is reshaping demand across the housing spectrum, particularly in rental housing, as cities expand faster than traditional housing supply models can adapt.

Brookfield highlights that the opportunity is not merely about volume, but about quality and formalization of supply. As the report states, "As India's working and middle class continues to grow and urbanize, there is a deep opportunity to provide institutional-quality rental housing in a country where roughly 70 percent of rental housing remains informally managed."

The dominance of informal rental arrangements underscores the scale of structural inefficiency in India's housing market.

Brookfield sees this fragmentation as a significant entry point for institutional capital capable of developing and operating professionally managed housing platforms at scale. The report notes that such conditions create compelling opportunities to acquire, create and expand platforms, and institutionalize fragmented market segments across the housing spectrum.

The outlook situates India's housing opportunity within a broader global recovery in real estate. Brookfield observes that financing markets are normalizing, with renewed liquidity enabling price discovery and reactivating deal flow, creating a supportive backdrop for long-term investments. ANI

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## JACQUELINE FERNANDEZ VISITS OLD SCHOOL: FELT SURREAL

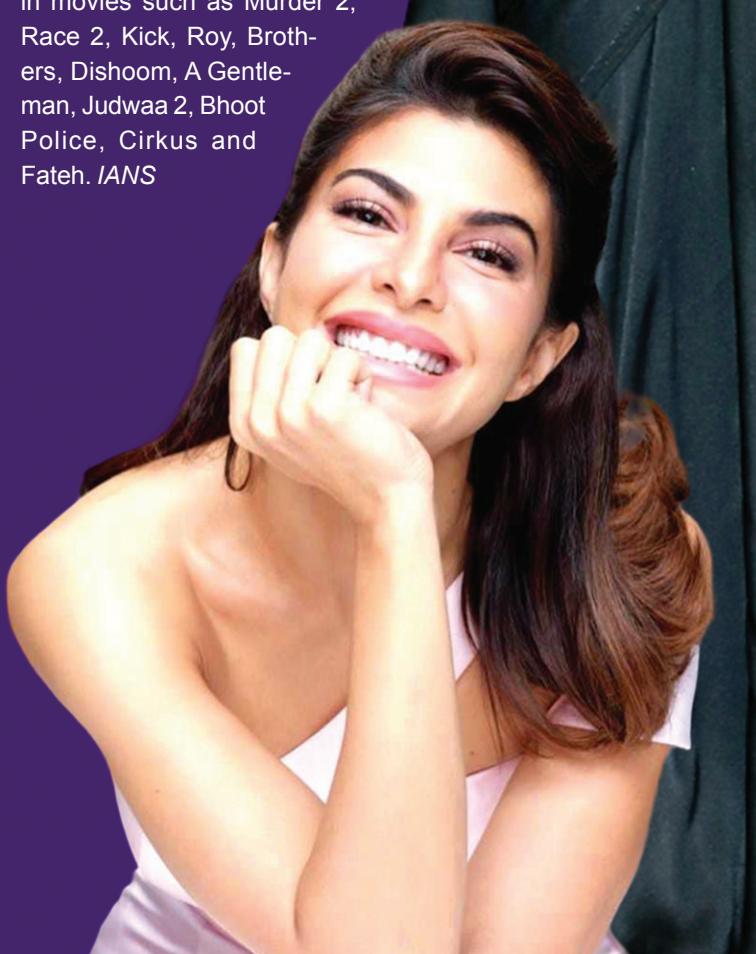
Bollywood actress Jacqueline Fernandez had a surreal experience as she made an emotional return to her alma mater.

The actress visited the Sacred Heart School, where she had received her early education in Bahrain. She shared a video of her visit on Instagram and is seen meeting the teachers and students in the campus.

The actress wrote in the caption: "Felt so surreal to be back here at my old school! Sacred Heart School! Thanks for this wonderful welcome."

Jacqueline was raised in a multi-ethnic family. Her father, Elroy Fernandez, is a Sri Lankan, and her mother, was of Malaysian and Canadian descent. She was crowned Miss Universe Sri Lanka in 2006, and represented her country at Miss Universe 2006.

After making her debut in 2009 with Aladin, the actress was seen in movies such as Murder 2, Race 2, Kick, Roy, Brothers, Dishoom, A Gentleman, Judwaa 2, Bhoot Police, Cirkus and Fateh. IANS



## WHAT RASHMIKA MANDANNA MOST PROUD OF IN 9-YEARS

Rashmika Mandanna was showered with a lot of love by the netizens as she completed 9 years as an actor. Expressing her gratitude to all her admirers, Rashmika, who made her debut with 'Kirik Party' penned a heartfelt note on her Instagram Stories.

The 'Animal' actress revealed that, along with her movies, she is also proud of the family she has formed during her journey.

"9 yearsss!! I still can't fully wrap my head around that...26 films later, what I am most proud of isn't just the work....it's the family I've found along the way. All the love, the patience, the faith, the little moments, the big moments...everything from these nine years makes my heart feel so full.

Full of joy...full of pride...full of gratitude. (sic)", wrote Rashmika.

She thanked her admirers for always having her back.

Rashmika added, "Today, reading your posts, your messages, your tweets, it genuinely made my heart smile so much. It made me feel calm, content and sooo loved...Thank you for standing by me through every phase, every high, every doubt, every learning."

IANS



## TOP TEN HINDI FILM SONGS

- 1 Gehra Hua: Dhurandhar
- 2 Ishq Jalakar - Karvaan: Dhurandhar
- 3 Dhurandhar - Title Track: Dhurandhar
- 4 Aawaara Angaara: Tere Ishk Mein
- 5 Sitaare: Ikkis
- 6 Saiyaara: Saiyaara
- 7 Shararat: Dhurandhar
- 8 Lutt Le Gaya: Dhurandhar
- 9 Deewaniyat : Ek Deewane Ki Deewaniyat
- 10 Sahiba: Sahiba-Aditya Rikhi

## Malti Chahar on AMAAL RELATION-'SHIP'

Former Bigg Boss 19 contestant Malti Chahar has finally addressed the chatter linking her to music composer Amaal Mallik, shutting down all speculation and calling for an end to what she terms a manufactured narrative.

In a strongly worded clarification, Malti took to X, formerly called Twitter, where she stated that there was never any relationship or "ship" between the two.

She wrote: "Let's clear this once and for all. Amaal and I had no relationship or any kind of "ship." He asked for my number, and we met only once. We talked and shared some personal information. After that, we were in touch over the phone. That's it! there was nothing else between us." IANS

## KAJOL IN MOOD FOR GIVING SOME 'BAD ADVICE'

Bollywood actress Kajol woke up, and chose violence. As the year draws to a close, the actress took to the Stories section of her Instagram, and shared a note in which she spoke about being in a mood for giving some bad advice.

She wrote, "I'm giving free bad advice today. Ask me anything".

Kajol's quirky nature has always set her apart in Bollywood. Unfiltered, spontaneous, and refreshingly honest, she has never tried to fit into the industry's polished mold. Whether it's her candid interviews, playful banter on reality shows, or hilarious social media posts, Kajol's humor feels effortless and real. She laughs loudly, speaks her mind, and embraces her imperfections with confidence.

This authenticity translates on screen too, making her characters feel alive and relatable. From cracking jokes at public events to teasing co-stars without inhibition, Kajol's quirks reflect a rare comfort in her own skin, something that continues to endear her to audiences across generations.

Earlier, the actress took to social media to wish Twinkle Khanna on her birthday in the sweetest way possible. Referring to the author and entrepreneur as her "partner in crime", Kajol posted an image that highlighted their close bond and playful camaraderie. IANS



## Sharvari looks back at portraits of 'favourite people'

As 2025 draws to a close, Sharvari has taken a moment to pause and look back at the people who ground her every day. The actress shared a series of portraits she had clicked of those closest to her, calling the collection "Grateful for them."

Sharvari took to Instagram, where she shared images featuring her sister, parents, younger brother, pet Miso, and members of her chosen family, faces that, as the "Munja" actress put it, are the reason she smiles every day.

For the caption, she wrote in the caption section: "As 2025 comes to an end, I was looking back at these portraits I shot of my favourite people. Calling this series "Grateful for them". My sister, Aai, Baba, Miso, my little brother & my chosen family.. They're the reason I smile everyday!"

On the work front, Sharvari will next be seen in "Alpha," which is a part of the YRF spy-universe. She will be sharing screen space with actress Alia. The two will be seen playing spies. 'Alpha' marks the first female-led action film from the spy-universe. IANS



## Saiyami Kher's NEW YEAR WITH FAMILY TRADITIONS

Saiyami Kher believes in starting the New Year close to home and surrounded by family and friends. Staying true to her tradition, the actress will begin the day with a run before easing into her familiar New Year celebrations.

Asked what her plans are for New Year's, Saiyami told IANS: "New year's is always back at home with my family and friends. It's a usual ritual. My friends and I lit a bonfire, had a barbecue, set up tents and camp outside."

This year, however, the actress is adding a fitness milestone to her celebrations. Determined to end the year on a high, Saiyami revealed that she plans to run in the morning, before joining her friends and family for the customary festivities.

"This new year I want to end on a high so I'm running the 31st kms in the morning followed by the usual ritual. Food, deserts, music, board games and camping (sic)," said the actress.

On the work front, the actress has wrapped up shooting for "Haiwaan" starring Akshay Kumar and Saif Ali Khan.

Directed by Priyadarshan, the film also stars Sharib Hashmi. Shot across picturesque locations including Kochi, Ooty, and Mumbai. IANS

## TALENTED RITU INSAN: A NEW WAY TO LEARN AND EARN THROUGH FASHION

NEW DELHI: In Haryana's Bhiwani district, where opportunities for creative careers rarely reach young women, Talented Ritu Insan has built something extraordinary - a fashion education movement rooted in access, dignity, and real economic possibility.

In November 2025, Talented Ritu Insan achieved significant national recognition by setting two India Book of Records benchmarks. The organization hosted:

- \* The fashion show with the maximum number of participants, recording 3,478 attendees and 848 runway participants

- \* The highest subscriber base for a sewing-focused YouTube channel, with 1.81 million subscribers

Held in Bhiwani, the event brought together participants from over 20 Indian states, including students, trainees, and first-time performers. The show highlighted disciplined training, coordinated grooming, and inclusive participation, reinforcing the brand's focus on opportunity rather than exclusivity.

These milestones positioned Talented Ritu Insan as a rare example of a non-metro fashion institution achieving national-scale impact without relocating to traditional industry hubs.

### **Building access through skill-based education**

At its core, Talented Ritu Insan focuses on accessible, employment-linked fashion education. The organization designs its training programs to address a common gap in traditional vocational learning: skills without income pathways. Instead of limiting instruction to stitching techniques alone, its courses integrate business fundamentals such as pricing, customer handling, order management, and sourcing materials.

This approach allows learners to convert skills into livelihoods quickly. Graduates from Talented Ritu Insan go on to run home-based tailoring units, boutiques, embroidery services, and small-scale production setups, particularly in towns where formal employment options remain limited.

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**Bhumi Pednekar says fashion has helped her stay rooted to who she is**

MUMBAI: Actress Bhumi Pednekar used social media to open up about the special place fashion holds in her life.

The 'Dum Laga Ke Haisha' actress shared that she uses fashion to express herself. She added that through everything life throws at her, fashion is something that has helped her stay rooted.

Sharing an album of some of her high-fashion moments, Bhumi wrote on her Instagram handle, "Fashion has been my quiet rebellion, my armor, my joy. Through love, hate, and every narrative formed around me, it's helped me stay rooted in who I am. (sic)"

Expressing her gratitude to all the designers and stylists who have helped create her own style, the 'Shubh Mangal Savdhan' actress added, "Grateful beyond words to the designers, to all the incredible stylists that worked with me, all makeup and hair artists, photographers, all assistants, master ji, dress dada and all magazine editors who shaped these moments." /ANS

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# Philosophy

## MOTHER MEERA

Avatars come from the Divine, while self realized persons go to the Divine. Avatars are always one with God and never lose awareness of the Divine, unlike Gurus who began ignorant. To become realized, people - through spiritual practice, meditation and Japa - work hard and then reap the fruit. Since they have worked strenuously, they expect others to work as they have; they do not have as much patience as do divine personalities. Also Avatars can change things faster.

To help people I send down Divine light. There are different lights which serve different purposes. I send whichever light is needed. Golden and white are the lights of Paramatman and are the main ones. The other light belongs to Avatars, Gods and Goddesses. The light of Durga is Red and is characterized by power.

The blue light is Krishna and is the light of knowledge and love. Violet light is the physical health. Green is the color of the life force in the material world. Or-



Mother Meera

removing other kinds of obstacles to your sadhana, your practice.

When I touch your head, the light moves upwards in the white line. It indicates like a meter the development of your sadhana. When there is no progress, the Light moves downwards along the line showing the degree to which your sadhana has deteriorated. When the light is continuous from toes to the top of the head, the person may have many experiences and visions, although some people have visions and experiences without this white line.

When the line gets to the top of the head people have the Paramatman Darshan. When the line has gone above the head, then there is a constant relation with Paramatman. If your aspiration weakens the line moves downwards as I said. One day you might even fall from your sadhana. This is a great crisis, which can however be prevented.

When you look into my eyes, I am looking into every corner of your being. I am looking at everything within you to see where I can give healing and power.

## 'I remove all obstacles to your sadhana' Gurus do not have as much patience as Avatars

ange is the color of sacrifice, the color of sanyasins.

Humans do not receive the Light continuously, but only at special moments, such as in Darshan. During Pranaam and Darshan the action of the Light is to create a balance between worldly and spiritual life. Apart from Darshan, there are rare moments of reception of the Light that bring the devotee rapid spiritual growth.

On the back of the human being is a white line running up from toes to the head. In fact two lines start from the toes, raise along the legs, join at the base of the spine and then become a single line reaching to the top of the head. This line is thinner than a hair, and has some knots here and there which divine personalities help to undo.

It is a very delicate work and great care has to be taken to undo the knots as there is danger for your life if the thread is broken. When I am holding your head, I am untying these knots. I am also

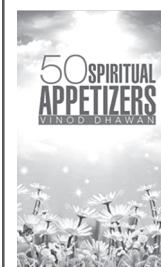
At the same time I am giving Light to every part of your being, I am opening every part of yourself to Light.

People receive this light in many ways. Some receive it through the head; some receive through the fingers - what do details matter? It is the effect that matters.

Excerpted from 'Mother Meera : Questions and Answers'. The 65th birth anniversary of Mother Meera was observed on December 26

### 50 SPIRITUAL APPETIZERS

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Jac O'Keeffe

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## Tarique Rahman's return: A narrow window for Dhaka-Delhi re-engagement

DR. GOLAM RASUL

Dhaka-Delhi relations, long characterized by uneasy cooperation punctuated by periodic flare-ups, have entered a fragile phase. Recent developments-violent protests in Bangladesh and India, the suspension of visa services, and threats directed at Bangladeshi diplomats in New Delhi-have eroded bilateral trust at a moment of political transition. If mishandled, this deterioration risks fueling communal polarization, paralyzing people-to-people ties, and unsettling the wider eastern South Asian region.

It is against this backdrop that Tarique Rahman has returned to Bangladesh at a time when political authority in Dhaka and established diplomatic routines are simultaneously in flux. As leader of the country's largest political party, his physical return into domestic politics ahead of the February national election alters the political landscape in meaningful ways. With the interim government led by Muhammad Yunus and New Delhi signaling readiness to engage with an elected leadership in Dhaka,

trust, often reflecting domestic political shifts in Dhaka. Under Sheikh Hasina, the Awami League aligned Bangladesh closely with India's strategic priorities. Cooperation on counterterrorism, connectivity, and regional integration reassured New Delhi and lent predictability to the relationship. This alignment also generated domestic unease, as critics argued that strategic alignment sometimes constrained Bangladesh's policy autonomy and narrowed its foreign policy options.

The recent political transition unsettled this equilibrium. New leadership under Muhammad Yunus and Dhaka's efforts to diversify external partnerships were interpreted in some quarters as signs of strategic recalibration. More fundamentally, the transition exposed a structural vulnerability: bilateral stability had often rested on personalized political trust rather than institutional depth. It is within this institutional vacuum that recent shocks-symbolic, political, and security-related-have escalated more quickly than they otherwise might have.

### The Present Crisis

The killing of Sharif Osman Bin Hadi served as the immediate catalyst for the current rupture. Although the incident was domestic in origin, its rapid political framing through street

mobilization and social media amplification-transformed it into a bilateral stressor. Nationwide protests followed, and in segments of the public sphere these mobilizations quickly adopted explicitly anti-India themes. What began as an internal political shock thus spilled across the border, illustrating how fragile domestic events can be externalized into foreign-policy pressure points.

Diplomatic responses unfolded in quick succession. Bangladesh suspended consular and visa services in New Delhi, while Indian visa centers in Dhaka and Chattogram were temporarily closed.

(The author is Professor and Chair of the Department of Economics, International University of Business Agriculture and Technology (IUBAT), Dhaka. His research focuses on regional trade, sustainable development, and South Asian economic cooperation) South Asia Monitor

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Udupi Palace is a South Indian vegetarian BYOB restaurant. My friend and I had dinner there shortly after I returned from south India. We were greeted warmly and the ambiance is pleasant. The menu is so enticing that we ordered too much food but it was almost as good the next day.

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# India's foreign policy in 2025; shrinking options and difficult choices

AVINASH GODBOLE

**2**025 was perhaps the hardest year for India's external affairs ministry (MEA) with several events, processes and narratives getting out of manageable control. India started the year with a sense of comfort and friendships but India's global outlook at the end of year is much more pessimistic than it was at the start of the year.

The world order itself has undergone a significant change in 2025 as each country became more inward looking and one might say selfish and, on the liberal side, there seems to be no one thinking about the idea of order as such. It is China that seems to have emerged as the major thinker of what the world order should be like since it is a revisionist power and not hiding its

dia seemed to have won strategically but lost tactically in managing the narrative of victory as was visible. There were also several games at play as Donald Trump claimed having played a decisive role in initiating a ceasefire whereas India denied this and maintained that it was Pakistan which asked for cessation of aggression. Denying a moral victory to President Trump may have played a role in the tariffs India faced later, according to some analysts. On the other hand, Pakistan's leadership not only praised Trump for his role in ending the conflict but also nominated him for the Nobel peace prize.

During Op Sindoos itself, it was visible that there was a direct tactical collusion between Pakistan and China, but the In-

that. America's aggressive trade posture has created structural damages to the foundations of India-US relations. This may be the bigger concern for New Delhi. President Trump used offensive language to address India's relations with Russia and its restrictive market policies. However, as noted by scholars, India's concerns with US demands, particularly in agriculture and other sectors are genuine and not likely to shift in a short term. India also eased restrictions on imports from the US, and this year saw the launch of Tesla motors in India.

India has also had to reduce its oil imports from Russia as a consequence of Trump's policies, including criticism and sanctions. Images of Modi's private car ride and extended talks with Putin and then his recent generous hosting in New Delhi notwithstanding, India has had to buckle under the US demands. India's FTA discussions with the US and Europe are also not progressing as expected with several bilateral concerns not being addressed. Scholars also have argued that FTAs don't work for India since India's lack of domestic reforms don't allow it to benefit from the FTAs, instead in most cases showing worsening trade deficits.

## Chinese Checkers

China, the dragon, is literally the elephant in the room as far as India is concerned. India's power gap with China has only increased in the recent past and that is the principal driver of how China sees India. India's relations with China warmed up significantly in 2025 with Prime Minister Modi undertaking his first China visit in more than seven years.

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## MYANMAR SHAM ELECTIONS

**M**yanmar (formerly Burma) conducted, on Sunday 28 December, the first phase of its general election held under supervision of its military government, while a civil war rages through much of the country. Under the shadow of civil war and questions over the poll's credibility, the initial round of Myanmar's phased general election, with signs of low voter turnout, for the first polls since a military coup in 2021.

The junta, having crushed pro-democracy protests after the coup and sparked a nationwide rebellion, said the vote would bring political stability to the impoverished Southeast Asian nation, despite international condemnation of the exercise. Final results won't be known until after two more rounds of voting are completed later in January.

It's widely expected that Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, who has governed Myanmar since an army takeover in 2021, will then assume the presidency as per experts on Myanmar. The military government has presented the vote as a return to democracy, but its bid for legitimacy is marred by the absence of popular opposition parties and reports that soldiers used threats to force voters' participation. While more than 4,800 candidates from 57 parties are competing for seats in national and regional legislatures, only six are competing nationwide with the possibility to gain political clout in parliament. The military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party is by far the strongest contender.

Voting is taking place in three phases, with last Sunday's first round held in 102 of Myanmar's 330 townships. Subsequent phases will take place on Jan. 11 and Jan. 25, but 65 townships won't participate in the election because of ongoing armed-conflicts. It wasn't clear if or, when the authorities would release aggregate figures of Sunday's voting, although counts were publicly announced at local polling stations. Burma was ruled by Tatmadaw initially, under Gen. Ne Win, from 1962 the first coup and his Burma Socialist Programme Party followed by a Military Junta. Myanmar entered a semi-democratic state in the early 2010s, which culminated with the 2015 elections in which democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi was again elected State Counselor and her party, National League for Democracy, won a resounding victory.

Burma, considered to be one of the richest South East nations, prior to 1962, is now amongst the poorest countries in the world. The reason is simple; self-centered Myanmar Army brass, along with cronies control everything from small retail shops to semi and large industry. Precious metals and stones, oil, gas and more recently rare earth minerals, are now in the control of China. In return China has flooded Myanmar with cheap and affordable household goods. China also makes sure the Myanmar junta has enough arms and ammunition to crush any uprising within the country.

However, things are beginning to change and most of the ethnic minorities have taken control of the border areas and key cities. India, which started its Look East Policy under P.M. Vajpayee, is moving cautiously with its investment in the Kaladan Expressway project across Myanmar. While most of EU and west do not recognize the current elections, China and other South East Asia nations, and ASEAN have remained soft on Myanmar's current controllers.

**J**im Corbett National Park is the oldest national park set amidst the foot hills of the Himalayas in the Nainital district of Uttarakhand. Known for housing the endangered Bengal tiger, Corbett National Park is part of the larger Corbett Tiger Reserve.

Famous for its wildlife safaris, Jim Corbett National Park has multiple resorts set on the riverside. Home to more than 650 species of rare and migratory birds, it is a haven for bird watchers. The most popular attraction at Corbett National Park is Dhikala, a forest lodge located on the border of Patil Dun Valley, which is known for the stunning location and rich wildlife.

Only 180 vehicles are allowed to enter the national park in a day. Jim Corbett National Park remains closed from July to October during the monsoons. However, Jhirna, Dhela, and Sitanadi tourism zones, remain open for tourists throughout the year. Safaris are organized in all the zones by two shifts by the forest officials in all the zones.

The Jim Corbett National Park was established in 1936 as Hailey National Park and is named after Jim Corbett who is a famous hunter and naturalist. It was the first place where Project Tiger was launched in 1973. The park is spread over an area of more than 500 sq km and is divided into 5 zones: Brijnani, Dhikala, Jhirna, Domunda and Sonanandi to promote tourism.

## THINGS TO DO IN JIM CORBETT NATIONAL PARK

**Jungle Safari:** The jungle safaris at Jim Corbett are organized once in the morning and in the evening. Divided into five tourism zones, each zone has a restriction on the number of vehicles allowed within at a given point in time. There are two types of safaris at Jim Corbett National Park - Jeep Safari and Canter Safari.

**Corbett Waterfall:** Corbett Falls is a beautiful waterfall, located 25 km away from Ramnagar in Kaladhungi. Surrounded by dense forests and offering a very serene environment, this 66 ft. high waterfall is a sight to witness, especially on full-moon nights. Nature lovers often camp and come on a picnic near this waterfall. A short 2km trek leads to Corbett Waterfalls.

**River Rafting in Corbett National Park:** River rafting in the Kosi River at Corbett National Park is one of the most beautiful ways to enjoy its speedy waters, taking you through Class II & III rapids. This activity is meant for all - beginners or professionals. River rafting in Jim Corbett can be done only during the monsoons.

**Dhikala:** The Dhikala Forest Lodge is the most popular tourist attraction at Jim Corbett National



# JIM CORBETT NATIONAL PARK

## "HOME TO THE ROYAL BENGAL TIGER"

Park. It is famous for spotting the Bengal tiger, spotted deer, Dhikala Chaur and the rare Hog deer. Dhikala is located 30 km inside the Dhangari gate and is open to tourists from 15 November to 15 June. Dhikala is the only tourism zone where canter safari is available.

**Brijnani:** Brijnani is one of the important zones of the Jim Corbett National Park. It is the best zone after Dhikala to spot the royal Bengal Tiger. Characterized by Sal trees, animals like Chital, Sambar and rare Hog deer can also be spotted here. Brijnani zone is also popular among birdwatchers as it houses almost 600 species of rare and migratory birds.

**Rock Climbing in Corbett National Park:** A challenging sport, rock climbing is a great option for adventurous souls since it involves using all muscle power to climb up an uneven rock formation. With Jim Corbett's mountainous terrain, it is an excellent destination for rock climbing since there are numerous rocks that are suitable for the activity.

**Rappelling in Jim Corbett:** Rappelling is quite a popular activity in Jim Corbett National Park, which is known for its wildlife and rugged terrain. It is a sport which involves climbing and then descending down a mountainside in a controlled manner with a fixed rope. Given that the area is full of uneven rocky formations, there are plenty of opportunities to engage in rappelling here. [www.holidify.com](http://www.holidify.com)



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