

# The South Asian Times

excellence in journalism

Vol. 16 | No. 37 | Jan 6-19, 2024 | 80 Cents

**NEW YEAR SPECIAL**

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**SANKARA**  
EYE FOUNDATION, USA

**HAPPY  
NEW  
YEAR**

The South Asian Times  
excellence in journalism



From left: **Divyogi Patel** (COO); **Murali Krishnamurthy** (Founder & Executive Chairman); **Dr R.V. Ramani** (Founder & Managing Trustee, Sankara Eye Foundation, India); **Radhakrishnan Sundar** (Board Member); and **Sridharan Krishnamurthy** (Founder & President)

## MAKING THE WORLD BRIGHTER, TOGETHER

The non-profit Sankara Eye Foundation (SEF), USA was set up in 1998 with the mission to help eliminate curable blindness in India. Over the last 25 years, it has grown from supporting one eye hospital to today, supporting 26 eye hospitals in 15 states in India - making SEF, USA the largest free eye care provider in the world!

SEF, USA's 'Vision 2030: March to a Million' goal is to perform one million free eye surgeries annually by the year 2030.

**52** NEWSMAKERS

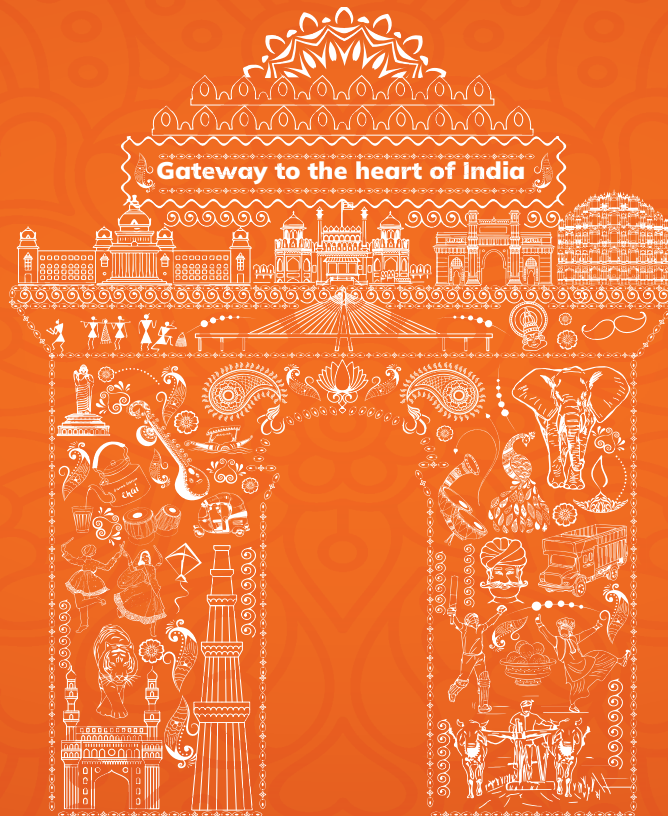
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# The South Asian Times

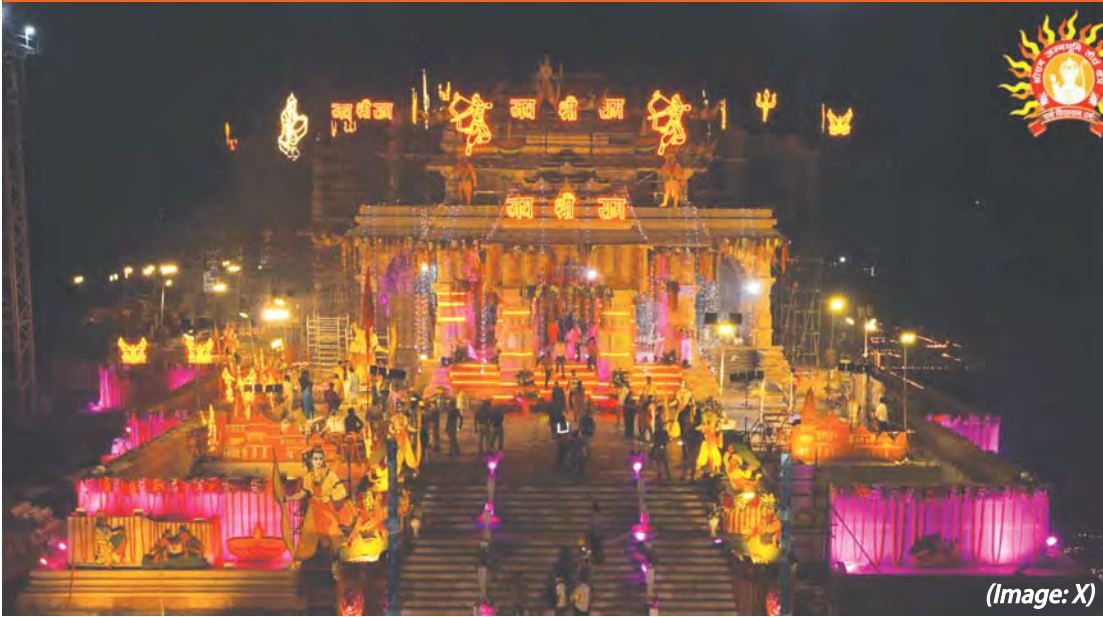
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New York Edition

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## Devotional Bharat: Engrossed in Ram Dhun



(Image: X)

The preparations for the consecration ceremony of the Shri Ram Temple in Ayodhya on January 22 are in full swing. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and few other select dignitaries including seers have been invited to the ceremony by the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra trust. The temple reflects the traditional Nagar style, and its architecture features 392 intricately carved pillars. The sanctum sanctorum has gold-plated doors, adding a royal touch to the grandeur.

## Canada, not the U.S., justifies extremism in the name of democracy: Jaishankar



In response to Washington, New Delhi had formed a committee to probe the matter (Image: X / @DrSJaishankar)

**New Delhi:** External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has made a stark contrast between India's fraught ties with Canada and that of the United States, saying that one justifies terrorist and extremist activities in the name of freedom of speech, unlike the other.

When asked in an interview, whether the U.S. could have been more considerate of India's position in the way it handled the Pannun episode, Jaishankar said, "The first is when the *Continued on page 6*

## Vibrant Gujarat Summit: Bringing vibrance to the Indian economy

**Gandhinagar:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the much-anticipated Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit 2024 in Gandhinagar, Gujarat, on Wednesday and asserted that the goal is to make India a developed country by the time it celebrates 100 years of independence.

Addressing the Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit 2024 in Gandhinagar, PM Modi *Continued on page 6*



India is the fifth largest economy in the world today (Image: PIB)

## United States seeks governance reform for postwar Gaza

- ▶ US defends its veto of call for Gaza cease-fire
- ▶ Israel taps top legal minds to battle genocide claim at world court
- ▶ Gaza ceasefire protests block New York City bridges



Multiple countries in the region have agreed to help rebuild the territory (Image: AJ)

**Tel Aviv:** U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke Wednesday to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas about reforming his government as Blinken sought to rally the region behind postwar plans for Gaza that include concrete steps toward a Palestinian state.

The U.S. is pushing for a reformed Palestinian Authority to govern Gaza once the war is over. Blinken says multiple countries in the region have agreed to help rebuild the territory and that wider Israeli-Arab normalization is still possible, but only if there is "a pathway to a Palestinian state."

In their meeting in the West Bank city of Ramallah, Blinken told Abbas that the U.S. supports "tangible steps" toward a Palestinian state, according to State Department spokesman Matthew Miller. He said the two discussed administrative reform.

The vision outlined by Blinken

faces serious obstacles. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government has so far rejected Palestinian Authority control in Gaza and adamantly opposes the creation of a Palestinian state alongside Israel. The autocratic, Western-backed Palestinian leadership, whose forces were driven from Gaza when Hamas took over in 2007, lacks legitimacy in the view of many Palestinians.

The war in Gaza is still raging with no end in sight, fueling a humanitarian catastrophe in the tiny coastal enclave. The fighting has also stoked escalating violence between Israel and Lebanon's Hezbollah militants that has raised fears of a wider conflict.

On his fourth visit to the region since the war began three months ago, Blinken has met in recent days with the leaders of Saudi

*Continued on page 6*



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# Presenting Organization of the Year 2023

## Letter from the Publisher



**Kamlesh C. Mehta**  
Chairman & Publisher

Dear Friends,

Warm greetings for a joyous, healthy and prosperous New Year.

Trust you, and your loved ones are well.

While welcoming the year 2024, looking back on 2023, it was a year of wonderful achievements.

While the Russia-Ukraine war was raging, the Israel-Gaza war erupted, which shocked the entire Western and Middle Eastern world. This war-mongering is endangering the world peace. We hope for greater peace and harmony for all in the times ahead.

India had much to rejoice last year. The world watched and applauded the successful hosting of the G-20 summit in New Delhi. ISRO successfully landing Chandrayan-3 on the South Pole

of Moon gave us a feat to be proud of. This first in the world was followed by another audacious space mission: Aditya-L1 is now orbiting the sun to study the solar atmosphere. Later this month, the inauguration of the long-awaited Bhagwan Shri Ram temple in Ayodhya will be another cheerful moment to celebrate.

The Team @ The South Asian Times is proud to present our annual New Year Special issue. With your esteemed support, we have graciously completed 15 years of glorious publication without any interruption. Thank you so much for your continued participation, it means a lot to us.

As every year, we start with an incredibly special edition by featuring The South Asian Times - Person of the Year. For the last 14 years, we have proudly featured a amazing Personalities / Organizations who have transformed thousands of lives with their generous Philanthropy, Guidance, and by sharing their Knowledge, Understanding, and Wisdom.

This year, The South Asian Times recognizes and honors a

highly reputed charity as Organization of the Year 2023. With a mission to eliminate needless blindness in India, Sankara Eye Foundation (SEF), USA has supported, for over 25 years, millions of free eye surgeries through the 12 hospitals run by Sankara Eye Foundation, India as well as their 14 Partner Hospitals,

covering most states in India. Now with their ambitious Vision 2030, SEF is targeting One Million free eye surgeries annually by the year 2030.

SEF, USA has inspired thousands to associate with Sankara to support its philanthropic and humanitarian activities. The Indian American communities and thousands of people outside America, especially in India, are proud of Sankara's services and leadership role in eliminating blindness. We wholeheartedly applaud and support their continued efforts in bringing the Light to millions of Sights, and proudly present them as "The South Asian Times-Organization of the Year 2023".

We appreciate the SEF, USA team for their cooperation in bringing out this special feature. We thank our Founding Editor, Mr. Parveen Chopra, who has handled all our Person of the Year specials since 2008, and has again beautifully created the Organization of the Year 2023 feature, even though he is overwhelmed with his own passion-project, ALotusInTheMud.com.

Our New Year & Person of the

Year special issues, print & digital, have been read by well over half a million people in America and all over the world, and they are proudly displayed by many families on their coffee tables and kept in their collectibles. Please contact us if you wish to have a hard copy, we will gladly mail it you with our compliments.

Since its inception, The South Asian Times has earned an immaculate reputation for its consistency for excellence in journalism, value-based content, clean display, and qualitative advertising. Our unique vision has continuously set new trends and standards in the South Asian media fraternity of America, both in print and online.

We the team @ The South Asian Times sincerely thank all our supporters and readers who have been integral partners in our gracious presence and success. Hope you will enjoy the New Year Special issue. Your comments and suggestions are always welcome.

*Kamlesh C. Mehta*  
Chairman@  
TheSouthAsianTimes.Info

# Cover pages of our last 10 New Year & Person of the Year Special Issues

<p>2023</p>	<p>2022</p>	<p>2021</p>	<p>2020</p>	<p>2019</p>
<p>2018</p>	<p>2017</p>	<p>2016</p>	<p>2015</p>	<p>2014</p>



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## OUR IMPACT

26 Hospitals in India

15 States covered in India

356,000 Free Eye Surgeries in FY '23

444 Million + Population covered

## United States and UK say Bangladesh's elections were not credible



Hasina's ruling Awami League won 222 seats of 299 contested

(Image: Scroll)

**Dhaka:** The United States and the United Kingdom said the elections that extended Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's rule were not credible, free and fair.

Both countries, which have trade and development ties with Bangladesh, also condemned political violence that preceded Sunday's election in which Hasina's party won more than two-thirds of the parliamentary seats while turnout was low and the main opposition party boycotted.

"The United States remains concerned by the arrests of thousands of political opposition members and by reports of irregularities on election day. The United States shares the view with other observers that these elections were not free or fair and we regret that not all parties participated," State Department spokesperson Mathew Miller said.

He urged Bangladesh's government to credibly investigate reports of violence and hold those responsible accountable.

The U.K. said the democratic standards were not met consistently in the lead-up to the election.

"Democratic elections depend on credible, open, and fair competition. Respect for human rights, rule of law and due process are essential elements of the democratic process. These standards were not consistently met during the election period. We are concerned at the signifi-

cant number of arrests of opposition party members before polling day," the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office said in the statement.

Hasina's ruling Awami League won 222 seats out of 299 contested. Independent candidates took 62, while the Jatiya Party, the third largest, took 11 seats and three smaller parties got 3 seats. The result in one seat remained undeclared. The election of one seat was postponed because a candidate died. The main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party led by former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and its allies boycotted the election, and voter turnout was a low 41.8%. While election day was relatively calm, a wave of violence preceded the vote.

The U.S. statement said it remains "committed to partnering with Bangladesh to advance our shared vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific, to supporting human rights and civil society in Bangladesh, and to deepening our people-to-people and economic ties."

Bangladesh is an important partner of the U.S. interest in the Indo-Pacific region along with neighboring India amid growing influence of China. China, Russia, India and some other countries congratulated Hasina for the victory and pledged to continue to partner with the South Asian nation.

## United States seeks governance reform for postwar Gaza

*Continued from page 3*

Arabia, Jordan, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Turkey. He says they are open to contributing to postwar plans in return for progress on creating a Palestinian state.

Meanwhile, the Israeli military said Wednesday it has found evidence that hostages were present in an underground tunnel in the Gaza Strip city of Khan Younis, which has become the focus of Israel's ground offensive.

The military showed the tunnel to journalists who were escorted into a neighborhood near the ruins of destroyed homes and streets. A corrugated tin hut covered the tunnel's entrance in a residential yard.

The military says Hamas is operating from inside the tunnels, and military officials have made the destruction of the tunnel system a top goal. Brig. Gen. Dan Goldfus, commander of the military's 98th Division, described the tunnels as posing "a 720-degree threat."

"It's not 360, but it's 720, underground and overground," Goldfus said.

## Canada, not the U.S., justifies extremism in the name of democracy: Jaishankar

*Continued from page 3*

Americans believed they had an issue, whether their belief is validated or not only the court can decide, they came to us and said look we have these concerns and we are sharing this with you and would like you to find out what's happening. The Canadians did not do this."

In November, an Indian national was charged with plotting to

assassinate Sikh separatist Gurbhant Singh Pannun. This development came two months after neighboring Canada publicly linked Indian intelligence to the June killing of another Khalistani Hardeep Singh Nijjar.

The White House stated that the Biden administration is treating the alleged plot to assassinate Pannun on American soil with 'utmost seriousness' and has raised the issue with New Delhi. Ottawa's accusations were dismissed as "absurd" but in response to Washington, New Delhi formed a committee to probe the matter.

Distinguishing between the two countries, Minister Jaishankar pointed out that the U.S. takes a stronger position on the "misuse of freedoms" than Canada. "Second, the US does not justify these separatist, terrorist, extremist activities in the name of freedom of speech. We have seen the US taking a much firmer position on misuse of freedoms than we have seen Canada take. Canada has also on occasions very openly interfered in our politics. We all remember events in Punjab. I think the only PM in the world who publicly commented on it was the Canadian PM. I'd say we have apples and oranges here and I'd not mix up the two," he added.

## Vibrant Gujarat Summit: Bringing vibrance to the Indian economy

*Continued from page 3*

asserted that the Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit 2024 is the first summit in this Amrit Kaal.

"This is the first Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit in this Amrit Kaal. Therefore, this is even more significant. Representatives from more than 100 countries who are participating in this Summit, are

crucial partners in this development journey for India," PM Modi said. He further said that India is working towards its goal for the next 25 years.

In the recent past, India completed 75 years of independence. Now, India is working on its goal for the next 25 years. We have the goal of making it a developed country by the time it celebrates 100 years of independence. Therefore, these 25 years' duration is India's Amrit Kaal," PM Modi said.

PM Modi said that the focus on structural reform was the reason behind India showing high rates of growth.

"We are all aware of the global circumstances. So, in times like these, if the Indian economy is displaying such resistance, if the growth in India is showing such momentum, a big reason behind this is our focus on structural reforms in the last 10 years. These reforms have enhanced the capacity, capability and competitiveness of India's economy" PM Modi said.

"Today, India is the fifth largest economy in the world. 10 years ago, India was in 11th position. Today, all major agencies estimate that India will be in the top three economies of the world in the coming years. Let people across the world do their analysis, but it is my guarantee that it will happen" PM Modi added.

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# MAKING THE WORLD BRIGHTER, TOGETHER

The non-profit Sankara Eye Foundation (SEF), USA was set up in 1998 to help eliminate curable blindness in India. Over the last 25 years, it has grown from supporting one eye hospital to today, supporting 26 eye hospitals in 15 states in India - making SEF, USA the largest free eye care provider in the world! SEF, USA's 'Vision 2030: March to a Million' goal is to perform one million free eye surgeries annually by the year 2030.

By **Parveen Chopra**  
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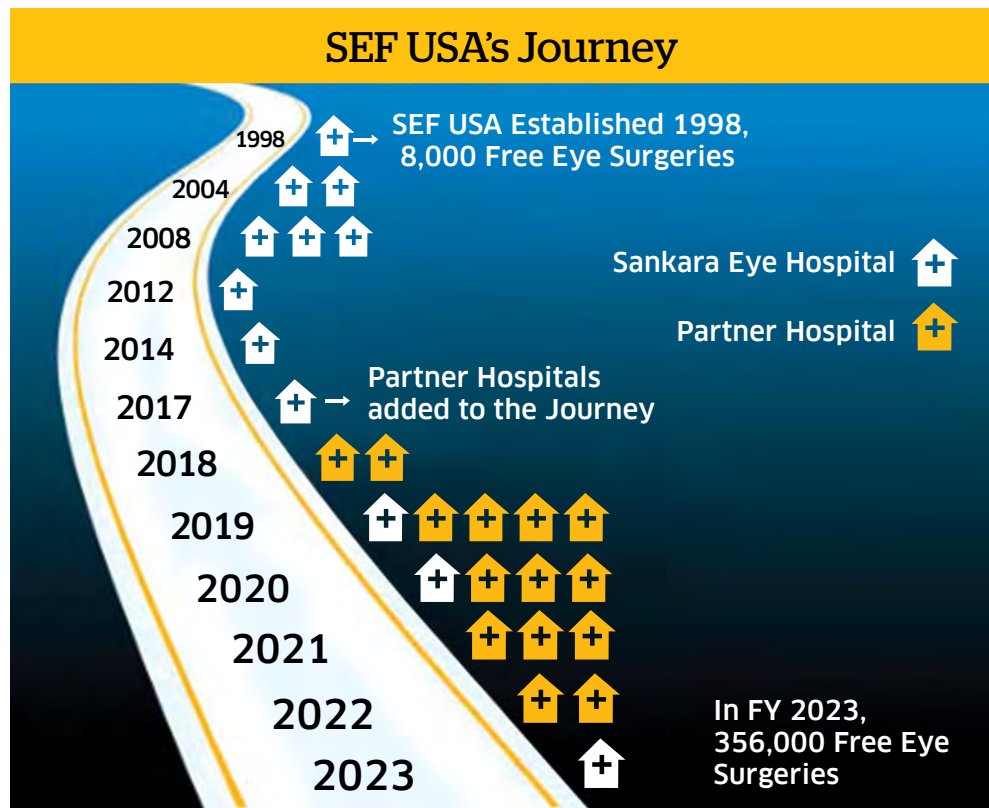
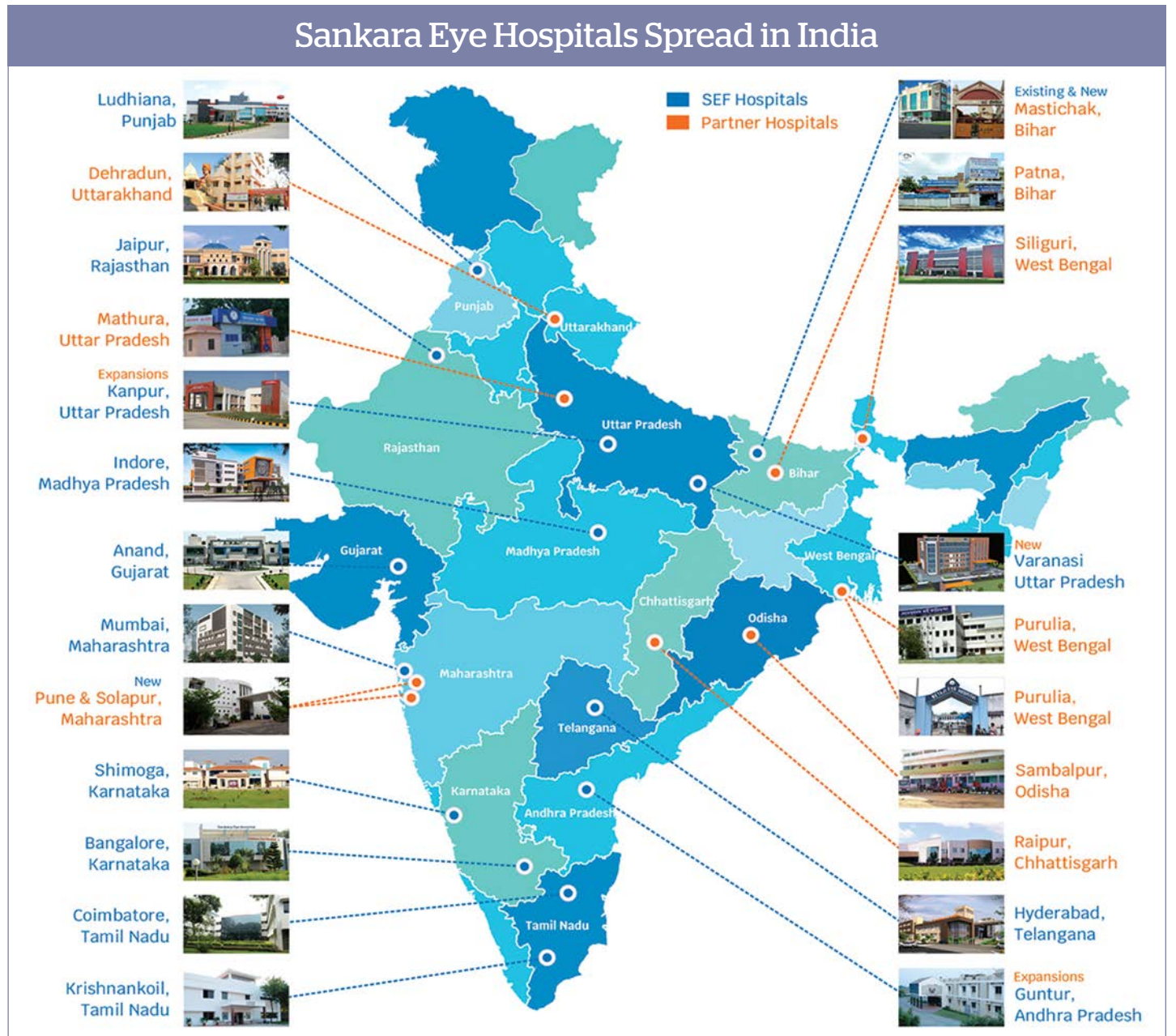
It is a well-known fact that one-fourth of the world's blind are in India, and it is largely the poor who suffer from the loss of sight due to untreated cataracts. To alleviate the humongous problem of curable blindness in India, the Sankara Eye Foundation (SEF), India established the Sankara Eye Hospital in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, in 1986, offering free eye surgeries to the poor.

In 1998, SEF, USA was launched to support the Coimbatore hospital and since then SEF, USA has contributed to a big and bold vision to eliminate curable blindness in India. SEF, USA became fully committed to raising resources to replicate the Coimbatore Hospital model throughout India.

SEF, USA ([www.giftofvision.org](http://www.giftofvision.org)) was started in the San Francisco Bay Area by Murali Krishnamurthy and his brother K. Sridharan in 1998. They were motivated by their uncle, P. Balasubramaniam, to support the good work of his friend Dr R.V. Ramani, founder of the Sankara Eye Foundation, India. Little did the two brothers, working in the tech industry, know at that time that this was going to flower into a beautiful movement and brighten up the lives of millions back home in India as well as motivate SEF volunteers and donors in the USA.

SEF, USA celebrated its Silver Jubilee last year and has now become the leader in community eye care as the largest free eye care provider in the world.

Starting from 8,000 free eye surgeries at the Sankara Eye Hospital, Coimbatore in 1998, SEF, USA has helped perform 560,000 free surgeries in 2023 at its network of 26 eye hospitals (12 Sankara Eye Hospitals and 14 Partner Eye Hospitals) in 15 Indian



states. They have built a capacity for over 600,000 free eye surgeries and over 444 million people are covered by this movement.

SEF, USA is a grassroots organization supported by

- 60,000+ donors and 1,000+ volunteers across USA
- 1,000+ staff and doctors at the network of 12 Sankara Eye Hospitals
- 1,000+ staff and doctors at the network of 14 Partner Eye Hospitals.

Talking to the SEF leaders in the USA or India, you hear a palpable excitement as together, they are marching to a new, ambitious goal.

Their Vision 2030 - March to a Million is aiming to:

- Build a capacity of one million free eye surgeries by 2028
- Scale up free eye surgeries to one million a year by 2030
- Make the entire system self-sufficient by 2035-36.

Their self-sufficiency model mandates 80% or at least 70% of eye surgeries at

each hospital to be conducted free for the rural poor, paid for by the paid surgeries. The model enables the hospital to not need additional funding to meet operational costs within 5-7 years. Sankara has a Rural Outreach Program to screen rural populations to identify those needing eye surgeries or suffering from other diseases of the eye.

The Vision 2030 march, no doubt, requires SEF, USA to scale up its fundraising efforts. They have calculated that they will need \$100 million till 2028 with \$50 million for capital projects and \$50 million for free eye surgeries. No child's play! But Murali is confident that \$100 million can be raised when broken down into 10,000 donors donating \$2,000 annually for five years.

The donors can rest assured their money is put to good use. Charity Navigator has given SEF, USA top four-star rating for nine consecutive years for commitment to transparency, accountability, governance, and for keeping the overheads low.



## The Inspiration

SEF, USA is inspired by the example of Dr. Ramani and his wife Dr. Radha Ramani. The couple had a flourishing medical practice when they were encouraged by the Kanchi Sankaracharyas to do charitable work. They started providing free general health care in the late 1970s but soon realized that eye care needed special attention. They established the first Sankara Eye Hospital (named after Sankaracharya) in Coimbatore in 1985 for community eye care.

Sankara's slogan is: 'World class eye care with a social impact.' The social impact is immediate and lasts a lifetime for every patient who has vision restored. Patients quickly return to becoming productive members of society and providers for the family. The elderly achieve independence, adding to their self-esteem.

Sankara Eye Hospital, Coimbatore started organizing eye camps in and around the city, brought patients to the hospital, provided them with high-quality eye surgery, took them back, and followed up to make sure that the patients were taking care of their eyes well. This resulted in a high success rate of over 98%. They also established an eye bank for eye donations needed for Corneal Transplants.

Here in the USA, SEF volunteers were motivated and started raising funds in earnest. They set up booths at various events to raise awareness for the noble cause. In 1999, SEF organized a light music concert by the Bay Area group, Pallavi, co-founded by Murali, a singer himself. It was their first show and raised \$18,000.

Donations from SEF, USA motivated the Coimbatore Hospital to start performing more and more free eye surgeries. Certificates were sent to every donor with the name of the patient and other details. It is a practice they continue diligently. A cataract surgery costs under \$30, which is easy to solicit in the USA. This prompted them



SEF, USA board members visited Sankara Eye Hospital in Coimbatore in 2016

to request donors to 'Open an Eye a Month' for \$360 a year or 'Open an Eye a Week' for \$1,500.

Murali recalls, "Right from the beginning we were aware of the importance of marketing, and we started advertising on TV, promoting our program of free eye surgeries supported by a donation of just \$30 for each patient. We also came up with a phone number 1-866-SANKARA and were quickly able to respond to queries."

## Growth Journey

A quantum leap in the partnership between SEF in the USA and India was waiting to happen. Rajeev Chamraj, an MIT graduate and MBA, noticed their TV ads and pushed SEF, USA team to embrace a big vision of building Coimbatore-style eye hospitals all over India to substantially address the problem of blindness in India.

There were no takers, understandably, remembers Murali, as they were all volunteers and were raising less than \$100,000 a year. The response from Dr Ramani and his team was not encouraging either. The logjam was broken when Kanchi Sankaracharyas (the Ramanis are their devotees) were approached and gave their blessings and support. One of the devotees of the Kan-

chi pontiffs donated land in Guntur, Andhra Pradesh for the hospital, which became the second Sankara hospital after Coimbatore. This set the ball rolling towards Vision 20/20, to raise 20 hospitals by 2020. SEF, USA volunteers moved forward with a lot of energy and enthusiasm.

For the frenetic expansion that followed, Dr Ramani gives full credit to SEF, USA's motivation, and financial support.

Sankara India Board Chairman Dr S.V. Balasubramaniam compliments them as being "masters in raising funds for our hospitals through donations big and small."

The cost of building an eye hospital at that time was between \$1 million and \$1.5 million. The SEF, USA team was concerned about this big jump in their fundraising ability. But the big target can be broken down into one thousand donors donating

## SEF, USA - SALIENT POINTS

**Proven Impact:** Over 25 years of dedicated service, delivering high-quality eye care and transforming lives through sight restoration.

**Sustainability Model:** A unique 70:30 model where 30% of paying patients fund 70% of free surgeries, making each hospital self-sustainable within five years.

**Scalable Vision:** Building on the success of over 25 hospitals, with plans to scale up to a million free surgeries annually and sustainably by 2030.

**Legacy of Giving:** Donors' contribution goes beyond immediate impact, creating a legacy that continues to give the gift of vision in perpetuity.

**Transparency:** A commitment to accountability, consistently recognized with the highest ratings from charity oversight organizations. (4-star rating from Charity Navigator)

**Direct Effect:** Every donation directly contributes to life-changing surgeries, with clear and measurable outcomes.

**Community Empowerment:** Free eye care services empower not just individuals but the entire communities, enhancing quality of life and economic opportunities.

**Global Recognition:** SEF, USA is known as the world's largest free eye surgery program, with a reputation for excellence and efficiency.



SEF, USA volunteers from various parts of the country at the 2017 Annual Volunteer Meeting at the Yosemite National Park



\$1,000 each - or only \$500 with matching funds from corporations or other generous donors. Further, \$1,000 donors can have their name or that of a loved one on the hospital Wall of Founders.

The small team of volunteers at the time came up with another brilliant idea to help build new eye hospitals. They sought and secured the support of community organizations associated with the state where the hospital was being built. Executive Council member Hema Chamraj and her team developed a template for such tie-ups. Any organization raising \$100,000 (now \$125,000) from its members becomes a Partner-in-Service of the hospital, duly recognized on a prominent plaque at the entrance to the Hospital. Narayana Kala, an energetic volunteer, brought his friends to SEF, USA. They, including Venkat Maddipati (now on the Board), played a key role in raising funds for the Guntur Project. The idea of Founding Donors and Partners-in-Service continues to deliver dividends.

SEF, USA worked with the Bay Area Telugu Association (BATA) and the Telugu Association of North America (TANA), and the magic of light entered Guntur, Andhra Pradesh in 2004. At BATA and TANA, their leaders Jayaram Komati and Vijaya Aasuri helped.

As SEF was growing rapidly, Murali Krishnamurthy left the IT industry and became full-time Executive Chairman in 2009.

## US Chapters

From the Bay Area, where the early volunteers were based, SEF, USA spread out. They have now many active chapters in the country, particularly in San Francisco Bay Area, Seattle, Southern California, Austin, Dallas, Houston, New Jersey, and more. The chapters are all volunteer-driven. They organize



Dr R.V. Ramani was conferred Padma Shri by the Government of India in 2019 for his dedicated work in the field of medical services



Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the Sankara Eye Hospital in Anand, Gujarat, in 2008 when he was Chief Minister of the state

events big and small. Dandia is their signature event and a money-spinner. The SF Bay Area annual Dandia is one of the biggest in California, attracting over 6,000 people.

SEF, USA Board member Divyogi Patel, who has a background in organizing events, raised the game by organizing big Bollywood shows with artists like Shreya Ghoshal. They continued with marquee names like Sonu Nigam, Kumar Sanu, Alka Yagnik, Hariharan, Sunidhi Chauhan, Ali Zafar, Shankar-Ehsaan-Loy, and Udit Narayan. This raised awareness about Sankara's mission and brought in many new donors.

Murali fondly remembers a donor (who would like to remain anonymous) who single-handedly gave \$9.5 million cumulatively from 2008 to 2014. He started by giving \$750K to complete the Sankara Eye Hospital in Anand and after that every other year he donated more.

There are at least five donors who have given one million or more.

## Partner Eye Hospitals

Around 2015-16, SEF, USA started partnering with like-minded eye hospitals in India to expand the Sankara footprint to the Northern and Eastern states and to give some breathing time to SEF, India to consoli-

date and further develop Training and R&D.

SEF, USA board member Sundar Radhakrishnan who lives both in India and the USA, built a small team to support the Partner Initiative and do financial and operational due diligence of the Partners.

Sundar gives an overview of the Partners Initiative: "We start supporting the new Partner Eye Hospitals in a small way like providing for additional free eye surgeries and later for facilities like operation theaters, community wards, to support more patients. We support minor and major expansions and if there is a good scope then we help them build a new hospital."

Akhand Jyoti Eye Hospital in Bihar is the most prominent of Partners. Founded and headed by a firebrand Mritunjay Tiwary, they were already focused on doing free eye surgeries. They specifically located themselves in the rural area of Mastichak to be where the beneficiaries are.

## How untreated cataract leads to blindness

- India is home to one-fourth of the world's blind population.
- 80% of blindness is either preventable or curable.
- A major cause of blindness is cataract.

### What is a cataract?

Dr R.V. Ramani explains that the Latin word 'cataract' means waterfalls. When you stand behind a sheet of water falling, you can't see anything in front. Our eye lens takes the light rays and focuses onto the retina, which is the screen. The eye lens is a crystalline clear at birth. As age advances, just like the greying of the hair, there are protein changes in the lens. And at some stage, the lens becomes opaque. When it becomes progressively more and more opaque, it stops transmitting the light inside. The person is blind. If you leave the cataract for years, the retina loses the capacity to perceive light. It becomes an advanced cataract, which is a challenge to operate.

Cataract removal surgery just costs less than \$30. That is why Sankara mission is to eliminate needless blindness by providing free surgeries for those who cannot afford it or do not have access to it.

In all, SEF, USA supports 14 Partner Eye Hospitals run by 11 Partner organizations in the states of Bihar, Odisha, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Maharashtra.

### In 2023, SEF, USA completed four hospital projects:

- Sankara Eye Hospital, Hyderabad (new)
- Netaji Eye Hospital, Purulia, West Bengal (refurbishment and minor expansion)
- Akhand Jyoti Center of Excellence, Mastichak, Bihar (new), a 500-bed hospital
- H.V. Desai Eye Hospital, Pune (major expansion)

### The following hospitals are coming up in 2024:

- R. Jhunjhunwala Sankara Eye Hospital, Varanasi
- Kalyanam Karoti, Mathura
- Shankarseth Sable Eye Hospital, Solapur
- Major expansion of Sankara Eye Hospital, Guntur, AP

### In 2025, they hope to complete the following projects:

- Major expansion of Sankara Eye Hospital, Kanpur, UP
- Akhand Jyoti Eye Hospitals in Patna (new), Ballia (expansion), Samastipur (expansion) and Purnia (expansion), all in Bihar.

To achieve Vision 2030, SEF, USA plans to add more Partner Hospitals. Towards their goal of one million free eye surgeries by 2030, the network of Sankara Eye Hospitals will deliver 430,000 free eye surgeries annually and all Partner Hospitals together will deliver 570,000 free eye surgeries.

## Covid relief

When Covid hit, like everyone else, the eye hospitals supported by SEF, USA were also struggling to run as they were not getting any paid patients to sustain free eye care, and even free patients were coming in small numbers. Thanks to their donors, SEF, USA put in place a Paycheck Payment Protection Program for all the hospitals to save the day. In turn, they won the confidence of the Partner Hospitals, some of which are now more willing to increase their surgery capacity.

A big donor and supporter of SEF, USA, Ram Reddy organized a Virtual SEF-Envision-2020 event in December 2020. This was the first of a kind and many well-known entrepreneurs like Anand Mahindra participated. The event raised a lot of awareness about Sankara's mission.

With Covid behind them, Vision 2030 beckons SEF, USA.

**You can join SEF, USA's 'Vision 2030: March to a Million' Journey to provide one million free eye surgeries annually by 2030.**

**Headquartered in Milpitas, CA, Sankara Eye Foundation, USA is a 501(c)(3) registered non-profit organization. All contributions are tax-deductible to the fullest extent allowed by law.**

**Donate @ [www.giftofvision.org](http://www.giftofvision.org)  
Contact for more information  
[info@giftofvision.org](mailto:info@giftofvision.org); or 1-866-726-5272**

(All photos courtesy: SEF, USA)



Parveen Chopra feels blessed compiling this Organization of the Year cover feature and thanks SEF, USA team for their help. He has started his own non-profit, *ALotusInTheMud.com*, a web magazine focused on wellness and spiritual content for all.

WISHING YOU ALL A  
VERY HAPPY NEW YEAR

Very warm and heartiest congratulations to

**Sankara Eye Foundation, USA**

On being Honored as

**The South Asian Times**  
excellence in journalism



May this well-deserved recognition inspire and motivate every member of the **Sankara Eye Foundation, USA** to continue their incredible work, bringing light and hope to countless lives.

*With Best Compliments & Warmest Wishes for an Amazing 2024*

**Nimmi & Kamlesh C. Mehta**



# SANKARA SHOWCASE

The eye hospitals supported by Sankara Eye Foundation, USA are in India, so their activities span both countries.



Dr R.V. Ramani set up the Coimbatore Eye Hospital in 1985 for community eye care



SEF, USA involved BATA (Bay Area Telugu Association) when building their eye hospital in Guntur, Andhra Pradesh



Board members R. Sundar and Divyogi Patel at a summit in Mumbai in 2022 with representatives of Partner Hospitals to brief them about Vision 2030



Famous singer Falguni Pathak (middle) at SEF, USA Dandia



Murali Krishnamurthy escorting Shreya Ghoshal, who did a few concerts for SEF, USA



Playback singer Shankar Mahadevan visiting Sankara Eye Hospital in Bangalore



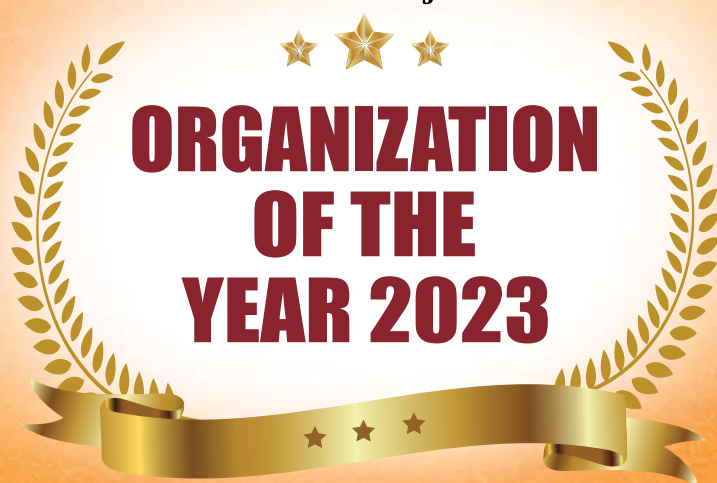
SEF iWalk Walkathons raise funds while promoting health



SEF, USA chapters organizing successful Dandia - often with Preetysa & Sameer

*Heartiest Congratulations to*  
**Sankara Eye Foundation, USA**

On being Honored as  
**The South Asian Times**  
 excellence in journalism



*Wishing you all the best for Vision 2030*



*Mohan Wanchoo (on the mike), philanthropist and entrepreneur, as well as The South Asian Times Person of the Year 2021, was Co-Chair of the gala of Sankara Eye Foundation, USA at Cipriani in New York*

*With Best Compliments From*

**Kavita & Mohan Wanchoo**

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# The credit for Sankara's expansion goes to SEF, USA

*Dr R.V. Ramani, Founder and Managing Trustee, Sankara Eye Foundation, India, and a Padma Shri honoree, gave this interview from Coimbatore, where he had started the first Sankara Hospital.*



## Dr R.V. Ramani

Founder and Managing Trustee,  
Sankara Eye Foundation, India



Dr R.V. Ramani and Dr Radha Ramani founded the Sankara Eye Foundation, India in 1977

### Q How satisfied are you with the phenomenal growth of Sankara?

A What we achieved over these 47 years for the mission that we had set up has boosted our morale. It encourages me and my colleagues to do better and see that we reach out to more and more needy patients. Sankara India so far has touched about 10 million lives, both outpatient and inpatient. Over six million patients have been examined. And over 2.4 million free eye surgeries have been performed.

### Q What has been the contribution of your partner, Sankara Eye Foundation, USA in this growth?

A I clearly remember, it took five years for my friend P. Balasubramaniam to convince his nephews, Sridharan and Murali, to support a good cause like ours from the USA. When they saw what we were doing at the Coimbatore Eye Hospital, they were overwhelmed. They said, "Doctor, you should spread your wings and share your experience and expertise for the benefit of the rest of the country!"

But the logistics of healthcare are complex, unlike in other fields like manufacturing; here we are dealing with human beings. It also needs big investments. We were content with the Coimbatore Hospital, so the credit for the expansion goes to SEF, USA. And now we have instituted a lot of systems and processes to run this pan-India movement effectively.

During Covid, donors from Sankara, USA, Indian donors, and our committed team all helped to keep the operations running.

### Q SEF, USA is a volunteer-run organization. How about Sankara, India?

A I am a volunteer too. In these 47 years, I have not taken a single rupee. Not that I'm a millionaire, but I'm content with what I have. Initially, me and my wife, Dr Radha Ramani, had our flourishing medical practice. We gave that up and now both of us are fully involved in Sankara. Those on our Board and the Steering Council are also volunteers.

But all our doctors and staff have paid jobs.

### Q Will Vision 2030 of one million free eye surgeries a year be achieved?

A Definitely. Given the right opportunities, we might even exceed the target. But we are keeping in mind not just the numbers; quality of care is paramount for us. For that single individual getting cataract surgery, it is his pair of eyes, his vision, and his future.

### Q Sankara's mission is to serve the rural population. But your hospitals are in cities.

A We set up hospitals in cities to get quality manpower and modern infrastructure. Secondly, the paying patients come from the cities. Our Gift of Vision model is such that the rural people can be examined and screened at their doorsteps. Then they are taken on buses to the base hospital, where they get the best treatment.

We have our field workers and software called SERVIS (Sankara Electronic Remote Vision Information System) to make the rural outreach program run smoothly.

Now we are even making the local children volunteer as sight ambassadors. We give them a card and tell them, "Go and ask your grandfather or grandmother to read that from a meter away. If they can't, please ask them to come to us." It is selective publicity in the rural slums. The idea is to ensure the economically weaker sections avail our services.

We have chosen a need-based cause as almost one-fourth of the world's population of blind are in India. They live in darkness due to various reasons: non-affordability, non-availability, and inaccessibility.

### Q Why are one-fourth of the world's blind in India?

A Multiple factors. One, our population is huge. In 80% of cases, blindness is caused by unoperated cataracts. Genetically too, Indians are predisposed to cataract formation. Lately, we are also seeing diabetic retinopathy. Lack of nutrition used to be a factor, but not anymore because of nutrition programs for children in many states. Yet, in some rural interiors and tribal hamlets, malnutrition persists.

### Q You say that the spark to start Sankara came from the Kanchi Sankaracharya.

A Yes, His Holiness Sri Jayendra Saraswati was visiting Coimbatore in 1977 when the Kamakshi temple was being built here. He implored doctors to devote at least two hours a week to the poor. He also wanted a clinic for the poor in the temple. I came to know about that and ended up offering primary healthcare – examining the patient, and giving them medicine for 50 paise.

Later when our Coimbatore hospital was ready, I went to seek the blessings of the Paramacharya, Chandrashekarendra Saraswati, in Kanchipuram. He christened it Sankara. And it is his blessing taking us forward to this day.

### Q How has Dr Radha Ramani contributed to Sankara's success?

A She has been my friend, philosopher, and guide. She is equally passionate about the cause. At every stage, she has

“ For Vision 2030, we are keeping in mind not just the numbers, but also quality of care. For that single individual getting cataract surgery, it is his pair of eyes, his vision, and his future ”

guided us, suggesting course corrections when required. She has brought in the compassion factor, arguing, "These poor people are coming to us, and we need to show them that extra dose of compassion."

Dr Radha says that we must treat even the staff as family. They need to be taken care of. Their children should have a good future too. The motivation to do good also comes from my father, Dr A. Ramanathan, who was one of the three doctors serving the poor during a plague in the area.

### Q How does your program of empowerment of rural women work?

A Almost 80 per cent of our workforce is women. Empowerment of rural women is very close to my wife's heart and Dr. Radha runs that program. We identify secondary pass girls from poor rural families. Then they are enrolled in the Vision Care Technicians program; everything is paid for. Subsequently, they can specialize in roles like optometrists that we need in eye hospitals.

### Q You were honored with Padma Shri by the Indian government in 2019. How did you feel? Does Sankara get along well with the powers that be?

A This national recognition boosts our morale, but the Pama Shri was for the entire Sankara family. We have good relations with the government of India and state governments as well. Ultimately, all understand that our service reaches the poorest of the poor. And we are apolitical. Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated our hospital in Anand in 2008 when he was the Chief Minister of Gujarat.

### Q Your favorite quote is: 'Life is a sojourn on this planet. Service is the rent we pay.' Please elaborate.

A When we start in life, first we want to have a comfortable living for ourselves and our family. Once we have achieved that to a certain level, we start looking around: can I do something for others? Indeed, we owe it to them. Only when everyone is happy, the community is happy, the country will flourish.

I also love to quote Emerson: "The purpose of life is not to be happy. It is to be useful, to be honorable, to be compassionate, to have it make some difference that you have lived and lived well."



#### Brief Bio

Dr. R.V. Ramani received his medical degree from Kasturba Medical College, Manipal/Mangalore. Along with his wife Dr. Radha Ramani, he established a clinic in Coimbatore in 1972 in memory of his late father, Dr A. Ramanathan. Realizing the need for voluntary initiatives in health care, he established the Sankara movement 47 years ago with the blessings of Kanchi Sankaracharyas. Sankara has emerged as a 'world-class eye care institution with a social impact.'

Dr Ramani is a Major Donor and a Past President of Rotary Coimbatore Central – the World's first 100% Paul Harris Fellow Club.

'Gift of Vision' rural outreach eye care program initiated in the year 1990 as a Health Hunger Humanity Program of Rotary International and Rotary Coimbatore Central has been serving the rural population in 164 districts across 10 states in India.



Personable, passionate, affectionate... Many epithets come to mind when talking of Murali Krishnamurthy, who is at the helm of SEF, USA which he founded with his brother, K. Sridharan.

In Sridharan's words: "Murali has grown nicely as the face of the organization. One of his key qualities is how he motivates volunteers, treating them as family, listening to their problems, helping them, and sharing in their joy and celebrations. The culture of the organization has been built by Murali and his family. Murali has a rare ability to touch donors' hearts and has the unrelenting drive to accomplish the goals set for the organization."

Yes, his love is sprinkled with disarming candor and humor. He is wont to sing a stanza or two for you of a devotional or Bollywood song. That is his formula to win friends and influence people and meet the fundraising targets, which go up by a million or two every year.

Murali has this line about himself: "Initially I used to think that I am playing a major role in eliminating curable blindness, now it is very clear to me that I am the biggest beneficiary, and it is surely helping me grow spiritually." He now wants to help the volunteers and others benefit from this work and grow in their personal lives.

**Q How satisfied are you with the growth of Sankara?**

**A** It is like the water level slowly rising. You don't realize that you're going up and up and up. Now we are even more excited as we work on Vision 2030, which is very achievable by SEF, USA and Partner Hospitals. It gives me extreme satisfaction and inner joy. This profound journey has brought us spiritual progress. I'm calmer now. Earlier, when we inaugurated a new hospital, I would say, "Yay!" Now I say, "What next?"

It is a steady journey towards Vision 2030 now. So, we are executing whatever is needed.

**Q Mr SV Balasubramaniam, SEF, India Chairman, says that you repeat one million eye surgeries, one million... like a mantra.**

**A** Yes, I do that, but inside there is peace. Yet, I push every volunteer, so we reach our targets. I'm motivated myself and must keep motivating volunteers.

**Q How much credit do you give yourself for Sankara's success?**

**A** I have been very steadfast and stubborn about our big vision from the beginning and to leave a mark on the world. I learned from Swami Vivekananda: "Think big. You are Divinity." When we started from one hospital, nobody thought that we could grow so much. It has been my inner faith motivated

**“Anything I do is God's work, I'm not the doer. I'm fortunate to be able to do it. Swami Vivekananda says, 'Don't stand on a pedestal and throw money at people. Instead, bow down and give with humility because you are the beneficiary”**

# Right man for the right job

*In between making calls to potential donors to meet his target as the year was ending, Murali Krishnamurthy spoke to Parveen Chopra from his office in Milpitas, CA.*



**Murali Krishnamurthy**  
Co-Founder & Executive Chairman of  
Sankara Eye Foundation, USA

by Swami Vivekananda that we became the largest eye care provider in the world. And I do fire up people.

I was shy in the beginning; other people pushed me onto the big stage. And it was our board member Divyogi Patel, another spiritual person, who persuaded me to take the role of Executive Chairman.

**Q How did Swami Vivekananda inspire you?**

**A** In my youth, I happened to read his 'Karma Yoga' book. My perspective about life changed because of his big thinking, and his love for India. He cared about the masses and women. Anything I do is God's work, I'm not the doer. I'm fortunate to be able to do it. Swami Vivekananda says, "Don't stand on a pedestal and throw money at beggars. Instead, bow down and give with humility because you are the beneficiary." That thought always keeps me on the ground.

**Q Dr R.V. Ramani, SEF, India Founder, credits SEF, USA for the growth of the Sankara movement.**

**A** Rajiv Chamraj, an MBA from MIT, who came to know about us in 2000, proposed to me the big Vision 20/20. I was not ready at the outset. Then I remembered Swami Vivekananda's teaching, "You are Divine. Think big." So, yes, the mission of 20 eye hospitals in India by the year 2020 gripped me. Sankara alone is racing to 17 hospitals now.

But when we approached the Sankara people in India with our plan to replicate their work throughout the country, they asked, "What do you know about building and running a hospital?" I said, "You have already done it." Then the question of funds came up.

The turning point came in 2002 when the Kanchi Sankaracharyas blessed our plan to build Sankara Eye Hospitals outside Coimbatore. So, his devotees bought land in Guntur, then in Shimoga, for the hospitals. Then, the Sankaracharya appealed to the chief ministers in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, and we got prime land for our hospitals much below the market value. So, our work kept accelerating.

**Q The other turning point must have been the strategy to seek Partner Hospitals.**

**A** Yes, Sundar played a big role in that. I used to always say, why can't we go outside Sankara to grow fast? Around 2016, Sankara doctors told us, "You're growing too fast, and we are lagging in training, etc. We need to use AI, we need to use telemedicine." We said we cannot slow down as thousands of our volunteers and our 60,000+ donors are all looking forward to us delivering the big vision. So that's when Sundar said, "I can build a Partners Network in India." The second phase of our growth started from there.

Now we are focusing on the number of surgeries going forward. From the one million we want to reach by 2030, Partner Hospitals are committing to deliver 570,000.

Inspired by us, other eye foundations are coming up now and they want to copy us.

**Q What has been your brother Sridhar's contribution to Sankara?**

**A** He is the one who first visited the Coimbatore Hospital and returned home impressed. He is the one who brought in Ahmad Khushnood Qazi, a CPA, to do the paperwork for starting SEF, USA. Sridhar takes care of all paperwork; he ran Marketing and initially prepared all collaterals. Many of his IIT Madras batchmates are big donors.

Sridhar was also very committed to his work at Intel. I, however, was able to devote a lot of time to Sankara even before I became Executive Chairman in 2008. So, Sridhar has been a more behind-the-scenes kind of person at Sankara, strategizing and pushing us to work hard to execute our plans. We want to see him fully active in Sankara.

**Q What has been your wife's role in your work?**

**A** Her name is Kala. Initially, when volunteers met at our house, she'd feed them. Then, one day our office manager quit, and she was assigned that job. She is always there to help if any volunteer asks.

She is low profile, but without her, it will be difficult for me to run Sankara.

*"Muraliji always downplays his wife's role, but at Sankara, Kalaji is known as the BOSS. All the backend work is handled by her and her team. She is a perfectionist; as they say, when things work well, no one knows, and you only realize the work done when problems arise. In Kala's case, she has quietly propelled SEF to where we are today."*

- An admiring Board Member

**Q You always play up the role of volunteers.**

**A** Yes, they are an equally important part of a charity. They are giving their time or their money. They are doing service. So, we must think of their progress, and their happiness. We have seen their children growing up. Now they are taking charge of many of our events.

**Q In terms of fundraising, how much are you doing now and what are the targets going forward?**

**A** As we speak, we are at \$9.6 million and the target for 2023 was \$12 million. By 2028 to build a capacity of one million surgeries, we have determined that we will need \$50 million for surgeries and another \$50 million for capital funding. 10,000 people donating \$2,000 every year for five years makes it \$100 million.

**Q What can donors expect in return?**

**A** We have evolved a detailed system. Anybody who gives a thousand dollars, their name goes on the hospital Wall of Founders. With \$5,000 you become a Golden Founding Donor. The Platinum Wall of Donors is \$10,000. With higher donations, people can have their names displayed in the consulting room, pharmacy, operation theater or the cafeteria. An entire ward can also be named after you. We have 60,000+ donors supporting us, and they support Capital projects and/or free eye surgeries. Those donating for surgeries get a report on who got the surgery on which day.



**Brief Bio**

Murali Krishnamurthy is Co-Founder and Executive Chairman of Sankara Eye Foundation, USA.

An NIT Trichy graduate, he earned a master's in Computer Science from Southern Illinois University, Carbondale. He worked in the IT industry before taking up the SEF, USA position in 2009.

His God-given traits of friendship for all, organizing cycle tours, inspiring friends, multilingualism, and singing found the best fit at SEF. Pallavi, the music group he co-founded, performed at a fundraiser for SEF, USA.

Murali received the 'Distinguished Alumnus' award from NIT Trichy presented to him by India's ex-President Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam in 2014.



# SEF, USA are masters in raising funds for our hospitals through donations big and small

**S.V. Balasubramaniam**, Chairman, Board of Trustees, Sankara Eye Foundation, India, spoke to **Parveen Chopra** via zoom from Coimbatore. Excerpts from the interview:

**Q How did your association with the Sankara Eye Foundation start?**

**A** I've been associated with Sankara from the very beginning. I was appreciative of the work being done by Dr. R.V. Ramani and Dr Radha Ramani. They are brilliant doctors and could have put up big private hospitals and created wealth. But they turned to social work and started a small clinic. Then, noticing that eye disease in India is most problematic, they decided to start an eye hospital as a service to society. When they started Sankara Eye Hospital in 1985 in Coimbatore under a trust, Dr Ramani suggested I take over its chairmanship. It is 40 years now, and it has been a rewarding journey we have undertaken together.

**Q Have you donated to the Sankara Foundation?**

**A** Yeah, to start with I did, for the building for the first eye hospital; it is named after my father. After that, we have been contributing as and when the need arises. Sankara is our project.

**Q How do you manage so many roles, chairman of Sankara, India as well as of Bannari Amman Group, which must be a big responsibility?**

**A** We do not do routine work. We have professionals and associates. In particular, Sankara is run by a group of people. Dr Ramani is the managing trustee. Under him are capable professionals like Dr Kaushik Murali (head of Medical Administration, Quality & Training) and Bharath Balasubramaniam (head of Operations and Administration). They are guided by the steering committee of senior personnel who have been with bigger companies.

**Q What has been your role and contribution to Sankara's success?**

**A** A big institution needs to set up policies and processes. I am associated with the total policy management of Sankara, India. We have a steering committee that meets once every three months. We discuss the future of the organization, both expansion and quality assurance. We look at many parameters such as: how many people are getting screened and how many of them get treated. We look up to and follow the highest standard available internationally.

**Q What has been your vision for Sankara? How do you see it achieve Vision 2030?**

**A** You have seen 40 years of Sankara's track record. Ten million lives have been impacted so far. Over 6 million rural people have been screened and 2.5 million free surgeries have been performed. 500,000 students have been examined for eye defects. They are all not just numbers. They are whose lives have been brightened for the rest of their lives.

Sankara will soon touch every region in India, directly through our hospitals or through Partner Hospitals. We are very clear about our mission, that no one should be needlessly blind in India.

**Q To achieve Vision 2030 how many more hospitals will have to be built?**

**A** Sankara is likely to build another 4-5 hospitals and we already have 14 partner hospitals. One million free surgeries annually by 2030 has always been a mantra for Mr Murali (Executive Chairman of Sankara Eye Foundation, USA). I do not doubt that we will reach that landmark with the quality of work being done by Sankara as well as the partner institutions, and the dedication and selfless work of Murali and other trustees of SEF, USA.



**S.V. Balasubramaniam**  
Chairman, Board of Trustees  
Sankara Eye Foundation, India

**Q The expansion of Sankara's work in India was inspired by SEF, USA. What do you think of their role?**

**A** SEF, USA is our partner. We applaud their role in raising funds. More so because we who are in India can see Sankara's work on the ground, and how it is benefiting so many patients, but people in America raising funds and donating to a faraway hospital is exceptionally motivating.

Indians should be grateful for the service of trustees and volunteers of the Sankara Foundation in America. It is their passion and motivation to donors that made us start hospital after hospital.

Yet, we have to look at quality, that's why we cannot expand Sankara to all the places in India. So, partner institutions have been evolved by the Sankara Foundation, USA, and it's working out very well.

**Q Murali Krishnamurthi is not just the Executive Chairman of SEF, USA, he has also become Sankara's face in America.**

**A** It was Mr P. Balasubramaniam, an associate of Sankara, India who insisted Murali and his brother Sridharan come to India, see the Sankara Hospital in Coimbatore, and look to funding further hospitals from the USA. SEF, USA was formed, and they were able to raise funds for the Guntur hos-

pital first. We never looked back after that. About Murali's involvement, I can tell you that his only mantra, whether night or day, is one million, one million free eye surgeries.

**Q Any initiative, innovation, or policy change at Sankara that you pushed for and implemented?**

**A** We plan well in a united way. For all these hospitals, even finding the correct location is very important. Now we know that the hospital location must be suitable for the people to come and even for the doctors to live and work. Then, the plan for each hospital has to be different from others. At the same time, the quality of work that we render is equal to whichever Sankara hospital you go to in India. So, planning and streamlining processes is what I have been doing along with Dr Ramani.

**Q Have you visited the USA to check out the great work SEF, USA is doing there?**

**A** Initially when Sankara started in the USA, I used to come along with Dr Ramani to attend meetings. Now many of the trustees of SEF, USA have been visiting India, particularly when we inaugurate new hospitals – and we have 13 operational hospitals. We get a chance to have joint meetings with them. Therefore, there is no need for me to come often to the US.

**Q A huge part of money raised for Sankara hospitals comes from America. Why not start a similar operation in India?**

**A** We do get funds from people and institutions here, such as the Infosys Foundation, Bajaj Foundation, and Jhunjhunwala Foundation. In fact, for our hospital coming up in Varanasi, 50% is being contributed by Jhunjhunwala Foundation. Some big corporations, as part of their CSR activity, give us funding in a big way.

Yet, we cannot compare with SEF, USA, who have been masters in retail marketing, in getting small donations, which we have not been able to do in India and still have to learn from them. So, a big salute to SEF, USA.

**Q In the modern, materialistic world, why should people support charities like Sankara?**

**A** It is not for the benefit of a single person. It is for eradicating curable blindness. Look at how it helps the person. You give them not only sight but also enable them to earn money for the family. So, in essence, we are working for the improvement of society as a whole. Besides, giving gives you great joy and happiness.

We have to see that the whole society around us is happy. Then only we can be completely happy. Even before CSR was mandated by the government, many of the Indian corporations as well as individuals have been donating quite a lot -- putting up hospitals, schools, colleges, and so on. Everybody should think of helping others. That could be the aim of life. Society owes a lot to our less fortunate fellow beings.

“ Sankara will soon touch every region in India, directly through our hospitals or through Partner Hospitals. We are very clear about our mission, that no one should be needlessly blind in India ”



**Brief Bio**

Chairman of Sankara Eye Foundation, India, S.V. Balasubramaniam is the founder and Chairman of Bannari Amman Sugars Ltd based in Coimbatore with five sugar factories. The group also runs distilleries, granite units, and other businesses.

SVB also chairs the Bannari Amman Institute of Technology and is the former Chairman Board of Trustees of Arulmighu Dhandayuthapani Swami Thirukkoil (Abode of Lord Muruga) in Palani, Tamil Nadu, as well as chair of the Vethathiri Maharishi spiritual foundation. He was bestowed an Honorary Degree of 'Doctor of Science' by Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, Coimbatore.

SVB is an Associate Member of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India as well as of the Institute of Company Secretaries of India.

Happy New Year!

2024

Heartiest Congratulations to

**Sankara Eye Foundation, USA**

On being Honored as

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**DR. NIRMAL K. MATTOO**  
FOUNDER AND PRINCIPAL



# 12 Sankara Eye Hospitals serving the poor in rural India

Since its inception in 1977, the hospitals of Sankara Eye Foundation, India have performed over 2.5 million free eye surgeries in 10 states that are covered by Sankara's Rural Outreach Program, the Gift of Vision. Operating on a self-sustainability model, each Sankara hospital in India provides a full range of eye care services. A typical Sankara hospital is a 225-bed state-of-the-art facility with 200 beds for patients receiving free service and 25 beds for paid patients. In 2024, a new community eye hospital is planned to be opened in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, and major expansions of existing hospitals in Guntur, Andhra Pradesh, and Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh are underway.



## Sankara Eye Hospital, Coimbatore

Sankara Eye Hospital on Sathy Road in Coimbatore is the mother institution. It was here that the legacy of affordable eye care for all was born.

- No. of Free eye screening done in Outreach Camps: 2,157,555
- No. of Free eye surgeries performed: 839,718

- No. of Outpatients: 1,413,077. Paid Surgeries: 113,613
- No. of Beds: 500 (450/50)

### Partners in Service

- Sri. G.V. Eswar & Family
- Sri. S.V. Balasubramaniam & Brothers
- Sri. N. Natraj & Family
- Sankara Eye Foundation- USA
- Sri. Dasi Budhrani & Family
- Tulsi Chanrai Family
- Rotary Coimbatore Central
- Mission for Vision Trust
- Mrs Hersha & Mr Hasu Shah
- Kikanis Charities
- Mr P M Narasimhan & Mrs Rajalakshmi N & Family
- Mrs Tehnaz & Mr Darius Bahadurji

## Sankara Eye Hospital, Guntur

Established in 2004 with the divine blessings of Kanchi Sankaracharyas, a magnanimous donation of land from Janachaitanya Family and monetary support from TANA USA, this hospital in Guntur has become a premier eye care institution in Andhra Pradesh sought after by all sections of the society.

- Free eye screening done in Outreach Camps: 840,769
- Free eye surgeries performed: 432,215
- Outpatients: 1,291,557; No. of Paid Surgeries: 146,375
- No. of Beds: 250 (200/50)

### Partners in Service

- Jana Chaitanya Family
- Telugu Association of North America & TANA Foundation
- Dr. Raja Veeraiah Kodali & Mrs. Saila Kodali
- Sri. Jayaram Komati
- Dr. Nageswara Rao Mandava & Dr. Ramamohana Rao Kancherla
- Bay Area Telugu Association (BATA), California
- Tulsi Chanrai family
- Mission for Vision Trust
- Cloupia & Pari Networks

## Sankara Eye Hospital, Bengaluru

This well-planned eye care hospital in India's Silicon Valley, built with the support of the Infosys Foundation and other donors, caters to the needs of Cosmopolitan Bengaluru as well as rural Karnataka. It received an NABH accreditation last year. It is equipped with superior technology to perform simple procedures like Refractions as well as advanced Lasik procedures.

- Free eye surgeries performed: 268,947
- Free eye screening done in Outreach Camps: 639,574
- No. of Outpatients: 1,164,661; No. of Paid Surgeries: 91,981
- No. of Beds: 250 (200/50)

### Partners in Service

- Dr. P. J. Bagilthaya
- Sri. V. Venkata Reddy
- Sri. P. Dayananda Pai and Sri. P. Sathish Pai
- Infosys Foundation
- Association of Kannada Kootas of America
- Nandalal Mohanlal Jairani Charitable Trust
- Sri. BV Jagadeesh & Anuradha Jagadeesh Family Foundation
- Salarpuria Foundation
- ARM India
- Mission for Vision Trust - Jaslok Family

## Sankara Eye Hospital, Shimoga

Located in Malnad, in central Karnataka, this is the only super specialty eye care facility in the region providing all services under one roof. Built on the banks of the Tunga River, this Hospital serves Central and Northern Karnataka.

- No. of Free eye surgeries performed: 248,195
- Free eye screening done in Outreach Camps: 623,141
- Outpatients: 721,028; Paid Surgeries: 61,867
- No. of Beds: 225 (200/25)

## Vision 2030: March to a Million

### © 12 Sankara Hospitals

(As of September 2023)





#### Partners in Service

- Dr. Ashok Sonni & Dr. Rajeshwari Seetharamaiah Sonni
- Mr. M. K. Chanrai & Mr. N. G. Chanrai (Jaslok)
- Sri. P. Dayanada Pai & Sri. P. Satish Pai
- Association of Kannada Kootas of America
- Kannada Koota Northern California Katte
- Mission for Vision Trust
- Sight Savers International, UK

### Sankara Eye Hospital, Krishnan Kovil (TN)

Opened in 2003 with the magnanimous support from Dr Vivekananda Raja and Family, Sankara Eye Hospital, Krishnan Kovil in Virudhunagar district is a tertiary eye care facility providing high-quality eye care for the 7 southern districts of Tamil Nadu.

- No. of Free eye screening done in Outreach Camps: 458,195
- Free eye surgeries performed: 197,168
- No. of Outpatients: 605,094; Paid Surgeries: 22,964
- No. of Beds: 220 (200/20)

#### Partners in Service

- Sri. Dasi Budhrani & Family
- Mission for Vision Trust
- Dr. Vivekananda Raja & Brothers

### Sankara Eye Hospital, Anand

Sankara Eye Hospital, Anand was started in 2008. A Super Specialty Eye Care Hospital, it is a cornerstone of eye healthcare in Gujarat. It has set a new benchmark in quality standards in eye care that include prevention, treatment, and eye health education for patients and their families.

- Free eye surgeries performed: 183,854
- Free eye screening done in Outreach Camps: 435,744
- No. of Outpatients: 240,078; Paid Surgeries: 20,975
- No. of Beds: 225 (200/25)

#### Partners in Service

- Asian American Hotel Owners Association (AAHOA)
- Charotar Leua Patidar Samaj of Bay Area, California
- Harshad & Nayna Uka
- Nilaxi & Ajit Patel
- Ravi & Shima Lal
- Babubhai & Sahradsben

### Sankara Eye Hospital, Ludhiana

Sankara's Super Specialty eye care facility on the outskirts of Ludhiana was set up in 2012. This semi-urban set-up covers 16 districts of Punjab providing maximum coverage and is actively involved in engaging local communities and social organizations.

- No. of Free eye surgeries performed: 78,914
- Free eye screening done in Outreach Camps: 478,779
- Outpatients: 175,375; No. of Paid Surgeries: 11,741
- No. of Beds: 120 (100/20)

#### Partners in Service

- Dr. Amarjit S. Marwah and Smt. Kuljit K. Marwah
- Sri. Amit Lal and Smt. Ruchika Lal
- Late. Gauri Lal and Bimla Lal
- Jaslok Community Eye Care
- Sri. Jessie Singh and Smt. Surinder Kaur
- Mission for Vision Trust
- Vascon Engineers Ltd
- Vipul Ltd

### Sankara Eye Hospital, Kanpur

Sankara's state-of-the-art facility in Kanpur is one of a kind in terms of infrastructure and facilities offered. Located on the outskirts of the city, this is the only super-specialty eye hospital in the area with all facilities under one roof.

- No. of Free eye surgeries performed: 93,258
- Free eye screening done in Outreach Camps: 248,050
- Outpatients: 140,790; No. of Paid Surgeries: 6,754
- No. of Beds: 225 (200/25)

#### Partners in Service

- Ms Tania Lal

### Sankara Eye Hospital, Jaipur

Sankara's state-of-the-art facility in Jaipur had its foundation laid in 2016 -2017. This was the 10th Sankara Eye Hospital. This hospital in Pink City, Jaipur, Rajasthan is a 225-bed exclusive facility, wherein 200 beds are for Non-paying free patients and 25 beds for paying patients.

Data update since inception till Nov. 2023

- No. of Free eye surgeries performed : 39,420
- No. of Free eye screening done in Outreach Camps: 110,216
- No. of Outpatients: 221,439 / No. of Paid Surgeries: 10,208
- No. of Beds: 225 (200/25)

#### Partners in Service

- Purvi & Santosh Janardhan In memory of K P Janardanan
- Rajasthan Association of North America (RANA), New York, USA
- Dr. Dhanpat C Mohnot, M.D., Jodhpur, In Recognition of Smt. Sardar Devi Mohnot, Jodhpur
- Shri Kamal Nayan Bajaj Trust
- Smt. Indu & Sri. Jyoti Kumar Maheshwari
- Enpee Group

### Sankara Eye Hospital, Indore

Indore, the cleanest city in India, saw the launch of Sankara Eye Hospital in 2020. This 225-bed Super Specialty Eye Hospital will serve 7 districts of Madhya Pradesh. Adi Sankara Bhagavatpadha met his Guru at Omkareshwar near Indore. The hospital serves the people of the state irrespective

of their socio-economic status.

- No. of Free eye surgeries performed: 16,296
- Free eye screening done in Outreach Camps: 49,179
- No. of Outpatients: 27,537; Paid Surgeries: 3,780
- No. of Beds: 225 (200/25)

#### Partners in Service

- Agarwal Group – Balaji Sewarth Vinod Agarwal Foundation
- Gopesh Kumar and Prerna Gupta Family
- Sri Shanti Agrawal - Chabcharia
- Shuthibai Shardadevi P & D Trust
- Sri Yekollu Mohan Rama Reddy & Smt Yekollu Sakuntala
- Mr Yeturu Venkara Satyasena Reddi & Mrs Yeturu Saroja Reddi

### Sankara Eye Hospital, Panvel

Rakesh Jhunjhunwala, who is commonly referred to as India's Warren Buffett, was keen to give back to society by constructing a free eye-care hospital. He joined hands with Dr. R.V. Ramani and the Sankara Eye Foundation along with other like-minded people to form The R Jhunjhunwala Sankara Eye Hospital (TRJSEH) Trust to serve the people of Maharashtra, rural and urban, and established a not-for-profit super specialty eye hospital in Panvel.

- No. of Free eye surgeries performed: 13,379
- Free eye screening done in Outreach Camps: 49,423
- No. of Outpatients: 13,811; Paid Surgeries: 1,002
- No. of Beds: 100

#### Partners in Service

- With The Blessing of Guru Ramdass Ji, Sardar Jagjit Singh Chadha & Sardarni Tripet Kaur Chadha
- In Memory of Prof. KC Mathew and in Honor Of Mrs Annamma Mathew Of Chennai
- Wen Giving Foundation
- Naraindas Morbai Budhrani Trust
- Usha & Radhakrishnan Sundar
- Rameshchandra Gulabchand Kacholia, Lata Rameshchandra Kacholia & Jagdish Gulabchand Kacholia
- Mission for Vision

### Sankara Eye Hospital, Hyderabad

Inaugurated in April 2023, with the blessings of Kanchi Sankaracharyas, this is the 13th Sankara hospital chain that has emerged as a pan-India movement providing high-quality, high-volume eye care to everyone irrespective of their socio-economic status.

- No. of Free eye surgeries performed: 1,128
- Free eye screening done in Outreach Camps: 5,054
- No. of Outpatients: 9,018; Paid Surgeries: 404
- No. of Beds: 225 (200/25)

#### Partners in Service

- In loving memory of Dr. M.V. Jagannadha Row Superintendent, Sarojini Devi Eye Hospital, 1976 & Mrs. M. Padmavati
- Bay Area Telugu Association (BATA), California
- Ramya & Harsha Pamulaparthi

## Block Donors

### Sankara Eye Hospital, Bangalore

- » Dr. P.J. Bagilthaya
- » Sri. V. Venkata Reddy
- » Infosys Foundation

### Sankara Eye Hospital, Jaipur

- » Shri Kamalnayan Bajaj Trust
- » Smt. Indu & Sri. Jyoti Kumar Maheshwari
- » Enpee Group

### Sankara Eye Hospital, Kanpur

- » Jaslok Chanrai

### Sankara Eye Hospital, Indore

- » Naraindas Morbai Budhrani Trust
- » Shri Kamalnayan Bajaj Trust
- » Wen Giving Foundation

### Sankara Eye Hospital, Guntur

- » Smt Pyda V. Rajeswari, Sri Pyda Rama Rao

### Sankara Eye Hospital, Krishnan Kovil

- » Naraindas Budhrani Trust

### Sankara Eye Hospital, Panvel

- » In loving memory of Mr T P Jhunjhunwala

### Sankara Eye Hospital, Ludhiana

- » Jaslok Chanrai

### Sankara Eye Hospital, Hyderabad

- » Phoenix Foundation

- Ram & Indira Reddy Kalakoti
- In memory of Shri C. Shyam Mohan & Shrimati C. Indira Mohan
- In honor of Shri Karempudi Krishna Reddy & Shrimati Karempudi Swarnakumari
- Chirag and DNF
- In memory of Late Smt. Vedavathi Chintamaneni and Late Sri. Krishna Rao Chintamaneni
- In memory of Dr YR Reddy
- In memory of G Sudhakar Reddy IFS

### Sankara City Hospital, Coimbatore

Sankara's City Center located in R.S. Puram established in 2011, is an affordable Super Specialty Eye Care Hospital. It is ideally located to cater to the city's residents and serves as a Referral Centre for the main Sankara Eye Hospital at Sathy Road.

- No. of Outpatients: 249,412
- No. of Paid Surgeries: 12,453
- No. of Beds: 11



# Poignant Patient Stories

*Sight-restoring cataract surgery makes patients self-confident, self-dependent, and productive members of society again.*

## Regaining her sight and livelihood

Shanthi, SEF, USA's millionth surgery patient, was then 35 and tended to a family of six. That may not seem extraordinary until you learn that she was the second wife of Anbumani, a physically challenged, unemployed man. She raised four children - two of her own and two of Anbumani's first wife. She is illiterate and works at the loom, weaving her livelihood day by day. Her entire family lived off her meager income.

Five months before her surgery, Shanthi attended a Sankara camp at Ponnammappettai, a suburb of Coimbatore, and was diagnosed with a cataract in the right eye. She was operated at the Sankara Eye Hospital, Coimbatore. She returned to her daily chores and all seemed to be going well until her left eye also developed a cataract.



Shanthi, a weaver tending to a family of 6, was Sankara's one millionth free eye surgery patient.

She quickly came to Sankara's camp, and her left eye was operated on in March 2013.

"When one finds it hard to find care and love amongst family and friends, Sankara has given me all that and much more, in fact, a

bright future for me and my entire family", Shanthi said. Her resilience was obvious to anyone who spoke to her. After the successful surgery, Shanthi was able to go back to work and provide for her family.

## A Father's Unconditional Love

Shanker is the proud father of Chhoti Kumari, a 13-year-old who loves biking and acing her math exams in school. But all this became a distant reality when, in

2022, her eyesight started diminishing. The writing on the blackboard had become blurry.

One day, she fell off her bicycle and had to be rushed to hospital.

After a quick eye exam, the local doctor asked her parents to take her to the city for a proper eye check-up. Several trips to Patna and about Rs 80,000 later, there was still no solution to the problem.

The neighbors were discouraging, "Why waste so much money on a girl child?"

But Shanker was determined as he did not differentiate between his son and daughter. Though a small farmer, he was ready to spend whatever he could to help his daughter regain her vision. A social worker asked him to try out Akhand Jyoti Hospital, 45 km from Patna. Chhoti Kumari was diagnosed with cataracts in both her eyes.

Today, after the surgery, she has more than 50% of her vision back. And soon, the rest will be restored! She is raring to return to school to ace her math exams again.



Chhoti Kumari, seen with her parents, had two cataracts removed at Akhand Jyoti Hospital, SEF's partner hospital in Bihar.

## Maaji Dekh Sakhte Ho?

Twenty minutes' walk to the eye camp, and 45 km away to the eye hospital. Could a 74-year-old woman make it?

For someone who had thought she had gone permanently blind, Sabra Khatun, from one of the most impoverished villages in remote Bihar, was surprised when she made her first journey to the eye camp organized by the local politician and social worker named Jeetendra Kumar.

"Maaji, you can get your eyesight back. It's just a matter of a small operation."

Sabra Khatun walked back down the

dirt road to her little bamboo hut, led by her granddaughter Neeta, all the while thinking whether this was even worth it.

Neeta coaxed her to go for it.

"Dadi, think about it! You can do your gardening again!"

Her whole family of sons, daughters-in-law, grandchildren, and her husband rallied behind her.

"Daai, you can stitch me a frock again."

"Maa, you can cook my



Ageing Sabra Khatun had to be coaxed by her family to get her eyes operated on.

favorite *litti-chokha*."

The distance to be covered was 45 km, and 3 days away from her family.

But the longer distance was to overcome her fear. Patel and his helpers came to pick Sabra Khatun in Akhand Jyoti Eye Hospital's camp bus.

And three days later, Sabra Khatun had her vision and life back!

As the optometrist at the next checkup asked, "*Maaji, dekh saktey ho?*" Sabra Khatun shyly replied, "*Sab kuch!*"

## Light at the end of the tunnel

Pinky, 23 years old, sat crying at the Government Community Service Centre, Mahadaleshwar (Madhya Pradesh) as she awaited the Sankara optometrist to give further instructions.

Daughter of doting parents, Pinky had gradually lost vision in both her eyes three years ago.

While she loved cooking and keeping house, she was now feeling handicapped and sat around the house listlessly, awaiting some ray of hope to enter her life.

Her parents were equally worried as Pinky was now of marriageable age, and finding a suitable groom for a blind girl was next to impossible.

The optometrist called out to Pinky for another vision test.

She wiped her tears and listened carefully to him.

He assured her that they would be able to operate on one of her eyes where a mature cataract was detected and was easily curable.

Pinky burst into fresh tears, scared of the word "operation".

The nursing staff and her father



Pinky was operated at SEF's Indore hospital.

pacified her and spoke to her about her vision being back in just two days.

Still a bit shaken, Pinky got into the Sankara bus headed for the Indore Eye Hospital.

Within the next 16 hours, the surgery was done, and Pinky with a bandaged eye was wheeled out of the OT for post-op recovery.

The operation was a success. By the next morning, the bandage was off, black glasses were on and a tearful Pinky bid us goodbye.

Only, this time, the tears were those of happiness!

## Nirmala - dependent no more!

Alone at 70, Nirmala Mahatme lives in a small cottage near the village of Banoti Gaon in Maharashtra.



Nirmala had her vision restored at SEF's Panvel hospital.

For the last couple of years, she was unable to see clearly.

She was losing her vision.

It affected her work, her farming, and even her daily activities.

Her children, now grown up with their own families, live far away in the cities, themselves trying to make a decent living.

All alone, Nirmala did not know who to turn to for help.

When Sankara's eye check-up camp was announced in her village, Nirmala's neighbor came up to her and asked her to enroll.

At the camp, Nirmala was told she had a cataract and would require surgery at Sankara's Eye Hospital in Panvel.

She did not have money to travel to Panvel, nor did her eyesight permit her to undertake such a journey.

Sankara volunteers explained to her that a van was ready at the camp site to transport all cataract patients to Panvel Hospital. They also explained that the travel, surgery, and hospital stay with food would be completely free.

Nirmala required no more convincing. After all, her eyesight was her means to survival. She quickly packed up a couple of belongings and happily boarded the van.

Today, she can see well, has got her job back, and recommends the eye check-up to all her friends in the village!

*Happy New Year!*

*May each day of the New Year be filled with  
warmth, peace, and cherished moments...*

*Heartiest Congratulations to*  
**Sankara Eye Foundation, USA**

On being Honored as  
**The South Asian Times**  
excellence in journalism



*With Best Compliments*

**FALGUNI & CHINTU PATEL**



# SEF, USA has big vision and will aim to expand beyond India in the future

**Sridharan Krishnamurthy**, Co-Founder and President of Sankara Eye Foundation, USA, gave an interview to *The South Asian Times* from Coimbatore in India. He was staying at the Sankara Eye Hospital there, which he says feels more like an ashram.



**Sridharan Krishnamurthy**  
Co-Founder and President  
SEF, USA

**Q How did you get involved with Sankara?**

**A** I had never heard about Sankara before my uncle, the late Mr P. Balasubramaniam, told me about it. He knew Dr R.V. Ramani, a fellow Rotarian, and greatly inspired by his work, began volunteering at the Coimbatore Eye Hospital. But every month he saw them struggle to meet the expenses, so he came after myself and my brother to raise funds in the US to help the Sankara Hospital. I was very busy at the time at Intel where I had a huge team. And Murali was busy with his light music and other activities.

Our lives changed when I went to India in 1997 for an Intel Conference in Bangalore. Uncle Balasubramaniam pulled me to Coimbatore where Dr Ramani took me around the hospital. Listening to the patients, and looking at how the staff treated them, was very touching. The patients thought I was one of the doctors and started blessing me in Tamil.

I was impressed for another reason. My daughter was born in a fancy hospital named El Camino in Mountain View, CA. I thought a charity hospital would be of a low standard but the Coimbatore Hospital was cleaner than El Camino! The equipment too was as good or even better. I asked the paramedics how they kept the hospital so clean while catering to poor patients. They said the patients are educated on the importance of cleanliness and taken care of like family.

I asked Dr Ramani, "What made you give up your successful career to do this volunteer work full-time? What keeps you going?" He replied, "With a 10-minute surgery, we can change a person's life completely. What more do you need to get satisfaction in life?"

Indeed, a dependent becomes independent. A child's life will change forever for the rest of their years. A person can become a breadwinner again when eyesight comes back.

I was convinced. I had found a purpose in life. I came back and talked to Murali, my elder brother. He said, "If you are convinced, then let us start."

To do the paperwork, I spoke to my neighbor, Mr. Ahmad Khushnood, a CPA from Pakistan. Securing the 501-c-3 approval, we officially launched the Sankara Eye Foundation, USA in 1998.

Divyogi Patel, a Board member, suggested that Murali take up Sankara work as a full-time job. Murali was not completely sure, since the family members were concerned about charity pay and loss of benefits. But Murali wanted to do it and worked on convincing everyone. In the end, he accepted and became Executive Chairman, and resigned from the SEF board to keep things clean. I am still a volunteer and am the Board President.

I was from the corporate background at Intel and wanted someone on the board with start-up and corporate experience. We may be a charity, but we wanted corporate-style governance, with compliance and processes. So, we invited Sundar Radhakrishnan, a friend and Murali's classmate from his engineering college, with a background in startups. Sundar gave his consent only after visiting the Sankara Hospital in Coimbatore. He donated a bus right away under the name of SEF, USA, not his name.

**“My goal is to do full-time volunteer work for Sankara. I am giving myself one or two more years to stabilize the startup I founded. Then I will devote myself fully to Sankara because it gives me soul satisfaction”**

**Q SEF, USA started raising funds by doing small events. How did you hit the big time?**

**A** Our volunteers' hard work and dedication paid off with Dandia events like the one we did at the Santa Clara Convention Center. We initially feared that many other organizations also do similar events in the Bay Area, and we may not attract the crowd. But we succeeded because we know how to organize events, and how to take care of the donors or the attendees. For example, at our first light music event, the theater was on top of a hill, so we had our volunteers stationed at the parking lot taking people up in cars. We are also disciplined, always starting on time.

Around this time, Divyogi Bhai said, "Why don't we bring up a big Bollywood music event now?" And that was it. From the Bay Area, we first expanded to Seattle where volunteers used to do small events like bridge tournaments. Once we started bringing big artists, we would take them to multiple cities. Our other chapters in Austin, Dallas, SoCal, New Jersey, Houston, etc., are also very good at organizing successful events.

Even though local volunteers in each city take charge of the event, we support them from the California base with marketing, and the major logistics. One of us would go to each city for the event.

**Q How do you manage to get so many volunteers to work for Sankara?**

**A** The events have been a conduit to get volunteers. Events also energize volunteers that they have something

to do together. Incidentally, Padma Parthasarathy, who's our board member and CFO, attended our concert, was impressed with our story, and started volunteering. Initially, meetings to plan an event used to happen at my house or Murali's house in San Jose. All our volunteers' families would get involved like ours. My daughter, Sowmya, went to India to volunteer at a Sankara hospital.

**Q What do you look forward to at Sankara?**

**A** My goal is to become a full-time volunteer for Sankara. I am giving myself one or two more years at Zan Compute, the startup I co-founded, to stabilize it. I want to devote myself fully to Sankara because it gives me soul satisfaction.

**Q You contend that you want to grow SEF as one of the top organizations working to eradicate blindness. Isn't it one already?**

**A** It is, but the job is not done yet. Because there are so many more people, so many more places where we have to go. Vision 2030 is an immediate goal to do one million free, sustainable eye surgeries every year. That is a good goal because at least one million new cases are added every year.

With other organizations joining us, I believe we can eliminate the backlog and have enough facilities to take care of new cases. Then we can say, we have eliminated curable blindness. That's the level to which we want to get India.

But, as an institution, I don't think SEF should stop with India. It needs to grow outside also because the problem of blindness is worldwide.

We are also on the lookout for a second level of leadership. In India, at the Sankara hospitals, they already have a second line in place. They also employ a strategic initiative called Balance Scorecard. It looks at customers, internal finance, marketing, etc, as a whole and tells you how you are doing. All Sankara hospitals are evaluated at year-end, and whoever scores the best gets an across-the-board bonus.

In terms of processes and systems, Sankara India is well set up. We are trying to do the same with our partner hospitals as well.

**Q SEF, USA has only one office in the Bay Area. How about opening one on the East Coast?**

**A** In good time, sure. First, we need to grow all the other chapters to be as strong as the one in California.

The spirit of Sankara and the success of Sankara is due to the dedication and determination of our volunteers and a single-minded focus on what difference it makes to people in India.

We tell people here, "When you travel to India, please go visit one of the Sankara hospitals or one of our Partner Hospitals. Then you will know the impact your work has?"

**Brief Bio**  
Sridharan Krishnamurthy is the co-founder and President of Sankara Eye Foundation, USA, and focuses on marketing and governance for it. For his work at SEF, he was awarded the Distinguished Alumni Award by the Indian Institute of Technology, Madras, and the Global Leadership Award by the PAN-IIT organization.  
Sridharan did civil engineering at IIT Madras and earned a double master's in chemical engineering and computer science from Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. He also got an executive MBA from Pepperdine University in Malibu, CA.  
He worked at Intel in System Software for over 26 years, where his team developed many software products. He received the Intel Achievement Award for his work and has many issued patents. He is a partner and chief product officer at Zan Compute, an Internet of Things startup in Silicon Valley.

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# Financial self-sufficiency model is the building block of Sankara's expansion

**Radhakrishnan Sundar** has been active in SEF, both in the US and India. He spearheaded the Partner Hospitals initiative to build capacity, which he details in this interview he gave from Mumbai.

**Q You enjoy a unique vantage point having been active in SEF, both in the US and India. What has been your unique contribution?**

**A** I have contributed significantly to its fundamentals and strategy. I was in the US when Sankara's initial meetings took place at my office.

We have been clear about Sankara's financial self-sufficiency as a building block for its expansion. I expressed it first when we formulated our Vision 20/20 in 2003-4. It is doable, I said, to build 20 eye hospitals in 20 years. But then you cannot keep funding their operations indefinitely.

I'd take credit for driving home that point for SEF, India and implemented the self-sufficiency clause. I am part of the Steering Council of SEF, India, and have had the opportunity to shape some of their decisions, making self-sufficiency a cornerstone, which became an integral part of the planning of all our hospitals. Our able team in SEF, India has successfully executed this strategy.

It's not easy to scale from one eye hospital to twelve hospitals. Neither was it easy in the US to scale up and raise money for such expansion. But both Sankara India and Sankara US did a great job in tandem, each working to their strength.

For donations, Sankara India was a little hesitant to approach the big banner names. I was able to do that job because I was based out of Mumbai then. I used my connections and my efforts to bring that dimension into the organization.

**Q How did you happen to spearhead the Partner Hospitals plan?**

**A** We have driven this initiative from India since its conception in 2015 and today, we are working with 14 Partner Hospitals.

What happened was that SEF, India was fully stretched running 12 hospitals all over India and we had underestimated the effort needed for one institution to run so many hospitals. Our Vision 20/20 to raise 20 eye hospitals by 2020 was in jeopardy.

So, we told the India team, "We have two choices, either say that we have done well, but we will not get to 20 hospitals or we continue with outside Partners." I offered to spearhead the effort and find the right Partners as I was based in India at the time. I was lucky that we got some good Partners, got some good breaks, and were able to build a team and put up all the necessary processes.

Partner Hospitals was kind of a startup we got rolling quickly and focused on the states where Sankara did not have a presence. We follow a step-by-step model with initially giving funds to perform free surgeries for 8-9 months. We make our fundamentals clear to them, that they have to be operationally self-sufficient and follow the quality model of Sankara. Once we feel comfortable with their quality of work, we partner with them.

Out of many, we selected a few to fund and signed up Partners in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, West Bengal, and Assam. After they come on board, we continue to monitor them, through monthly and quarterly reviews. Once established, we ask them if they wanted to expand for which we would help fundraise. It's a progression; some were happy with just getting surgery money and some went for expansion.

Covid was a blessing in disguise. We had about nine Partners at the time and all of them, even Sankara hospitals, were panicking as no free surgeries were performed because they could not go to the villages nor did they have any paid patients. With zero revenue and zero work, what do we do with all our staff, they asked. But thanks to our US donors, we created a payroll protection program for them.



**Radhakrishnan Sundar**  
Board member,  
Sankara Eye Foundation (SEF), USA  
Member, Steering Council of SEF, India

**“To eliminate blindness in India, SEF, USA has taken on a tremendous goal to do a million eye surgeries in a year. Our Vision 2030 strategy also aims to inspire our Partner Hospitals and other Eye Care Institutions to step up their game”**

The founders of these hospitals were very grateful, saying, "You are an all-weather Partner to us." and that helped us to gain their confidence.

In 2021, we launched our next phase, and at a summit in Mumbai, we put a challenge to our Partners. From performing 200,000 free surgeries we need to get to 1 million free surgeries a year. The combined capacity of all Sankara and Partner Hospitals at the time was 400,000. At the second summit, we started getting expansion proposals. The fact that Partners started marching to the million goal excited Sankara to start marching too. Our Vision 2030 plan now is for Sankara to perform 425,000 and partners to perform 575,000 free surgeries a year by 2030.

With the 2030 plan in place, we still need to raise big money. So, I tell some of the high-net-worth individuals I'm connected with, that today if you write me a check for \$10 million, I know how to use it. If you write me a hundred million check, I know how to use that too. I am confident we will succeed because no good movement ever fails for lack of money.

**Q Do the Partner Hospitals follow the 80:20 model of Sankara - 20% paid surgeries funding the 80% free surgeries?**

**A** 80:20 is a guide, not mandatory. Even at Sankara hospitals, it is 70:30, or close. For the Partner Hospitals, the mandate is that they must be operationally self-sufficient. If you are in a rural area, you may achieve 67:33. What we will not accept is 50:50 because that changes the culture of the organization. We want the charity part to be significantly larger than the paid part.

**Q How much of the funds supporting Sankara and Partner Eye Hospitals come from the Sankara Foundation in the US?**

**A** I would say, 60-70% comes from the US.

**Q Why not start a fundraising operation in India?**

**A** I'm not saying money is not available in India but people who are good at running hospitals are not good at fundraising. Someone else has to do the job for them. I have done my bit, but I don't live in India all the time. Setting up a fundraising arm of Sankara in India will involve much legal rigmarole.

**Q You have donated money to Sankara...**

**A** Yes, I'd say I am one of the donors who have given good sums. I have given both to the Sankara Foundation in the US and in India. I continue to give because they do good work. I also support other charities. Now there is the Hi 5 Youth Foundation, which I've started with my wife, Usha, to teach basketball to underprivileged children in India to empower them.

**Q How do you view Sankara's Vision 2030?**

**A** This incredible March to a Million, aiming to get to one million free eye surgeries a year by 2030, has become a big motivator for me. Starting to work with our Partner Hospitals opened my eyes. Whether it is Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, or West Bengal, the problem of blindness is huge. Some people are blind in both eyes, which is criminal because all you need to do is two cataract surgeries. Each surgery takes about 15 minutes, costs under \$30, and has a 99% success rate. There is no reason even one person needs to be blind.

What moves me is the blindness problem is huge and the existing resources fall short. Even we, at Sankara, have to build more hospitals to double the capacity to be able to reach one million. The need is to do six million free surgeries a year to eliminate blindness in India. Vision 2030 aims to inspire our Partner Hospitals to do more, and other Eye Care Institutions also to step up their game.



**Brief Bio**

R. Sundar serves on the board of Sankara Eye Foundation, USA, and sits on the Steering Council of Sankara Eye Foundation, India. He works extensively both in the USA and India, driving Vision 2030.

Sundar and his wife Usha are founders of Hi 5 Youth Foundation – a unique sports NGO, running a basketball excellence program, training over 4000+ underprivileged/tribal boys and girls in 40+ centers, in eight states of India.

Sundar is co-founder of Mastek Ltd. (a public company in India), one of the early global IT services companies in India, and Majesco - an insurance platform company.

He has spent equal time between India and Silicon Valley over the last 30 years – and is engaged extensively with technology startups as well as the social sector in both countries.

Sundar has an MBA from IIM, Ahmedabad, and Electrical and Computer Engineering degree from REC (Regional Engineering College), Trichy in Tamil Nadu.



# There is no better gift you can give than the gift of vision

**Divyogi Patel**, COO and board member of Sankara Eye Foundation, USA, shares his inspiring odyssey of vision, compassion, and transformation.

**M**r. Divyogi Patel has been an indispensable figure in the Sankara Eye Foundation (SEF), USA, since its inception. He shares his extraordinary journey of dedication, collaboration, compassion, and tireless efforts to bring the gift of vision to the rural poor in India.

Divyogi's association with SEF, USA commenced serendipitously when Kala Murali, Sankara's long-standing office manager, volunteer, and the wife of its founder, Murali, visited his store while seeking promotional items for SEF's inaugural event in 1999. "I remember being deeply moved and tearing up after watching Sankara's first video and hearing that 'there is no better gift you can give than the gift of vision,'" recalls Divyogi. "I decided, on the spot, not to charge the organization for the work, considering it my donation. Little did I know that this was the beginning of a truly transformative journey, with no turning back."

Shortly after their initial encounter, Muraliji insisted that Mr. Divyogi join the SEF, USA Board of Trustees, which at the time consisted of only two other members, Sridharan and Sundar. Together, they bore witness to remarkable growth, with nearly six-figure donations within the first year. Soon, they embarked on a trajectory of doubling donations year after year.

Around 2002-03, fueled by the fundraising momentum and the overwhelming support from donors and volunteers, SEF, USA were inspired to replicate Sankara's Coimbatore eye hospital model across India. Driven by a grand vision, they aimed to expand the incredible work of Dr. R.V. Ramani and Dr. Radha Ramani. One of their



Divyogi Patel with his wife, Bina Patel

devoted volunteers, Rajiv Chamraj, proposed the goal of achieving "Vision 20/20 by the year 2020." Consequently, they embraced the broader mission to eliminate needless blindness in India. By 2015-16, Sankara had established 11 hospitals throughout India.

Raising millions is no small feat, especially in a country like India, with its bureaucratic hurdles and infrastructural challenges. What sets SEF apart is its self-sustaining financial model, designed to reduce reliance on philanthropy in the long run. This model allocates 20% of resources from paid patients to cross-subsidize eye care for the 80% of rural patients who receive it for free, ultimately rendering each hospital self-sufficient within five to seven years.

Now, SEF is actively working toward its

next ambitious vision – "Vision 2030: March to a Million." This audacious goal aims to perform one million free eye surgeries annually by 2030. Recognizing the need for additional partners to successfully expand across India and extend coverage to northern states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, SEF's visionary board member, Sundar, and his team in Bombay embarked on a quest to identify partners and understand their unique requirements.

Today, thanks to the boundless love and generosity of donors and volunteers, SEF has evolved into the world's largest free eye care provider, operating 26 hospitals in 15 states, serving a staggering 444 million people, and performing over 350,000 free surgeries in 2023.

## Sankara DNA: Bollywood Events

SEF, USA's fundraising efforts have become synonymous with hosting grand Bollywood-style musical events and galas. Divyogi spearheaded these endeavors and further capitalized on their potential by organizing high-profile Bollywood events. These star-studded gatherings, featuring renowned artists such as Shreya Ghoshal, Shankar-Ehsaan-Loy, and Sonu Nigam drew large audiences, providing SEF with a plat-

form to showcase its charitable work. Notably, SEF's existing donors often brought their star power to Sankara galas. For instance, at last year's New York gala, the keynote speaker was Jay Chaudhry, Chairman of Zscaler and the richest Indian American. The resounding success of these events significantly bolstered SEF's visibility and fundraising efforts.

More recently, Divyogi assumed the official role of Chief Operating Officer (COO) to help guide SEF through its rapid expansion, with the ambitious goal of raising \$100 million by 2030. Despite never having worked for anyone else in his life, he shifted his entire focus to Sankara, dedicating himself wholeheartedly to the cause. He states, "I accepted the role of COO purely because Sankara is experiencing tremendous growth, and Murali needed assistance."

As a devout follower of Sathya Sai Baba, Divyogi truly embodies Baba's core message: 'Love all, Serve all.' He also embodies the spirit of SEF and its unwavering commitment to eradicating needless blindness in India.



### Brief Bio

Divyogi Patel has been a leading member of SEF, USA's Board since 1999 and assumed the role of COO last year, underscoring his deep commitment to philanthropy and to SEF. He has played a pivotal role in orchestrating SEF's mega events and spearheaded the foundation of Sankara Eye Hospital in Anand, Gujarat.

Born in Uganda, Divyogi spent his formative years in India. A graduate of Lancaster University in England, he moved to the SF Bay Area in 1994 and established several small businesses. He is a devotee of Sri Sathya Sai Baba and is on the Board of Sai Global Mission which supports activities relating to health, education, and nutrition in India.

## Former Board members reflect on Sankara's impact

### Girish Muckai

Former SEF, USA Board member



I was fortunate to be a volunteer for over a decade at Sankara Eye Foundation, USA - first as booth coordinator, then as event coordinator, and finally on the board. Our collective ability to dream big, set an achievable and impactful vision, fundraise effectively, and motivate and support the incredible team in India is unparalleled and enviable.

Four things stand out about SEF:

1. A bold vision and the mission to eradicate curable blindness.
2. A growing number of donors support every initiative due to their confidence in SEF's ability to march forward.
3. The ability of the SEF team in India to execute impeccably.
4. An amazing group of highly dedicated, motivated, talented, and able volunteers.

Having the ability to see is one of the basic human rights and SEF is on a mission to bring this to each and everyone.

### Anil Lal

Former SEF, USA Board member



Anil and Suman Lal

blindness in India as possible.

Though I have worked with a multitude of NGOs in both mainstream as well as the Indian diaspora, I have not encountered any other organization or group of leaders like SEF. Never in any meeting, anyone tries to exert pressure on a decision by using their position on the Board. Each leader treats all members as well as volunteers with due respect.

My involvement with SEF, USA started simply with a contribution in 2002 and blossomed into getting inducted to their Board in 2011.

I have always been impressed with the laser focus of our mission: Helping to cure as much curable

### C.N. Srivatsan

Steering Council member of SEF, India



I have been involved with the SEF, USA for two decades. What strikes me most about it, apart from the noble mission of eradicating curable blindness in India, is the passion and fervor with

which the office bearers and volunteers work for the cause. All of them have their jobs, families, and responsibilities. Yet, they find time to volunteer. I feel the noble cause draws them together.

The target of one million free eye surgeries in India every year by SEF together with Partner Hospitals in India is a humongous task for both sides - SEF, USA, and the hospitals in India. But looking at their track record, I am sure it will happen.



# Board of Trustees steers Sankara's mission and its execution

*The Board of Trustees of Sankara Eye Foundation, USA holds the crucial responsibility of overseeing the foundation's overarching direction, steering its high-level navigation, and devising comprehensive strategies for their effective implementation.*

**Four members of the Board delve into their motivation and passion for the Sankara cause and the roles they have been playing in achieving its objectives through strategic planning and decision-making.**



**Anju Desai**  
Board Member

**A**t SEF, USA it's all about volunteers. Their dedication and passion for the Sankara are admirable. We are not just an organization but a close-knit family working towards a common mission.

My involvement, from being a volunteer to serving as a board member, reflects a deep commitment to the cause of providing vision care to those in need.

The emphasis on transparency and accountability, especially in financial matters, is crucial for any charitable organization. It's heartening to see that SEF, USA not only recognizes the trust placed in it by donors but also actively works to honor that trust through responsible and efficient use of funds.

The success story of Sankara Eye Hospital, Anand in Gujarat, and my involvement in overcoming challenges during its completion showcases the organization's resilience and determination. The collaborative effort, involving not just the Gujarati community but also people from diverse backgrounds, speaks to the universality of SEF's mission and its ability to unite people for a common cause.

Passing the baton to the new generation and encouraging them to take charge is a forward-looking approach for me and SEF. It ensures the continuity and evolution of SEF's mission, bringing in fresh perspectives and ideas to address new challenges.

The strategic decision to take responsible risks, such as partnering with like-minded organizations, reflects an adaptive and innovative approach to scaling impact. It's encouraging to see SEF exploring avenues to reach its ambitious goal of one million free sustainable surgeries by 2030 and, ultimately, a mission to eradicate curable blindness.

The SEF story and my involvement with SEF are not just about building hospitals or conducting surgeries, it is also about building a community, creating a legacy, and impacting the lives of those less fortunate. I invite all of you to join SEF MOVEMENT and wish SEF continued success in our endeavors to bring the gift of vision to those in need.

The SEF story and my involvement with SEF are not just about building hospitals or conducting surgeries, it is also about building a community, creating a legacy, and impacting the lives of those less fortunate. I invite all of you to join SEF MOVEMENT and wish SEF continued success in our endeavors to bring the gift of vision to those in need.



**Venkat Maddipati**  
Board Member

**I**got involved with Sankara, along with my wife Visala, in the year 2000, and from 2003 began actively spearheading the fundraising for the Guntur hospital project along with the Bay Area Telugu Association (BATA).

When the first replication of Coimbatore eye hospital began at Guntur in Andhra Pradesh, we worked closely with BATA and the Telugu Association of North America (TANA). Together we did multiple fundraising events for the project and its subsequent expansions. This strategy set the blueprint for our future hospitals in other states such as Karnataka and Gujarat.

Visala coordinated Sankara Booths in the Bay Area. Our son Siddhartha also actively volunteered for Sankara and grew up with the Sankara family.

In Sankara, I mainly focused on setting up teams for various hospital projects, guiding them to raise funds for the respective hospitals. I talk to donors,

reach out to new donors, keep them updated about Sankara's expansion plans, and seek their continued support. Visala and I have traveled to many national conferences and events to promote Sankara. What keeps us motivated are the many people we encounter at the hospitals, elderly people, some of whose own kids have abandoned them, but the care and kindness they receive from the Sankara team is life-changing for them. Such stories warm our hearts and keep us motivated.

Further, our children start to understand the value of giving. The families of Sankara board members and volunteers are involved with the fundraising events in one way or another. So, it's always a family gathering here! There is no other joy I look forward to!



**Padma Parthasarathy**  
CFO and Board Member

**I** have been associated with the Sankara Eye Foundation, USA for 24 years, almost since its inception.

In 1999, my husband and I attended a flute concert event hosted by SEF, USA. We were very impressed by the cause and signed up as volunteers for one of their initial drives to raise funds for 2,000 eye surgeries. It has been a humbling experience to see the organization grow into what it is today.

I started taking care of the accounts and working with external auditors in 2000 and that made me grow into the role of CFO (Chief Financial Officer). Even though I am an engineer by profession, it has been a great learning experience for me to take up the challenge of doing the financials of the organization.

Besides financials, I have also been involved with strategy, planning, and growth of the organization. I am driven by the vision of the organization and the energy of the volunteers to achieve 1 million surgeries annually by 2030. We have had the fortune of visiting several Sankara and Partner hospitals in India. Every visit reinforces our belief that we are a part of a game-changing movement, energizing us.

Personally, Sankara has been an integral part of our family, and it has helped us learn the importance of selfless service.

Personally, Sankara has been an integral part of our family, and it has helped us learn the importance of selfless service.



**Sumanth Rajagopalan**  
Board Member

**I** joined Sankara Eye Foundation, USA in 2000. In Namaste America there used to be TV ads from Sankara and that is how we learned about the organization. I looked them up and met Muraliji. There were four of five of us at the time. I started with manning the Sankara booth at the events and then looked after the technical aspects of the SEF website, maintaining it for a decade or so.

In those days, Sankara was like a start-up and a lot of the systems and processes were being set up. I was also involved with setting up our first Network For Good donation page around 2002-2003.

I suggested having various donation tiers given various categories of expenses – such as cataract surgeries or food for patients. I thought that there were people who would donate \$30, but others might want to donate much higher amounts. So, we introduced \$90 for 3 surgeries and \$360 for one surgery every month for a year, and so on. That's how the online donation platform was set up. I also introduced a program for people to donate used cars. That is still a donation option today.

I currently look after many of the technical needs of the Sankara Eye Foundation, USA, be it Salesforce, Classy integration, or backend support for online ticketing for events like the Dandias where there can be more than 6000 people. We help wherever there is a need.

My wife Anu also gets involved with events and banquets. My children were born after we became involved with the Sankara organization and its activities, so they also grew up with its ethos.

Our motivation behind getting involved in the Sankara activities and planning for them is the huge need in India to eradicate needless blindness, which gets reinforced every time we go to India as a family and visit the Sankara eye hospitals.

Particularly when we go to our native places - the towns that I and my wife are from - to visit our family, and someone from there will say, "Hey, the Sankara bus came here, and we know the people who got back their vision."

Thus, we get to hear firsthand how people benefited from Sankara's service, and it is very gratifying and fulfilling.

Thus, we get to hear firsthand how people benefited from Sankara's service, and it is very gratifying and fulfilling.

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# I like Sankara Team's conviction, passion, and dedication

*Jay Chaudhry, one of the richest Indian Americans, has donated handsomely to SEF, USA, and was the Keynote Speaker at their 'Be the Light Gala' in New York last October. He spoke to Parveen Chopra from Reno, Nevada where he is based.*



## Q What did you like about SEF, USA to start supporting them?

A I came to know Sankara well in the past couple of years and thought they were serving a very noble cause. Their dedication over the past 25 years fascinated me. Lots of nonprofits come and go. SEF, USA's staying power and commitment are very special.

I met Murali and his team and was impressed by their conviction, passion, dedication, and the work they have been doing. So, I said, let's try to help.

What appealed to me was that SEF, USA is not run as a big, hierarchical organization, where very little reaches the beneficiaries. In contrast, SEF people are on the ground.

## Q Did you visit any of the eye hospitals they support in India?



**Jay Chaudhry**  
CEO, Chairman and Founder, Zscaler

A I have not, but hopefully, during the next trip I'll get a chance to do so. I do go to India because 40% of my company Zscaler's 7,000 employees are in India. Offering good opportunities to people in India who are bright, sharp, and ambitious is my way of giving back. In fact, we opened Zscaler's

India office in Bangalore before the Bay Area office.

## Q Do you intend to support SEF, USA in the future?

A Yes, I plan to support them, though I haven't thought about the numbers. SEF people are not pushy; they are mindful and

respectful and they execute a good plan to build eye hospitals. Ideas are a dime a dozen. I look at startups all the time. But SEF has a burning desire to get to a million eye surgeries every year. And if you have conviction, a burning desire, you go make things happen.

## Q Indian Americans are doing well here and many give to good causes. Do you think they should do more?

A I think it's always better to give more because there are lots of needy people. I think the causes that make an impact are more important than the donation amounts. Look at Sankara, they don't raise tons of money, but what they get goes to a very noble cause. I think education is also important. To be able to help in that field, I have also been involved in the American India Foundation (AIF). I got involved when Covid happened. Many of Zscaler employees in India were calling for help, for example, not finding a hospital bed with oxygen for a loved one. We made calls and rushed a bunch of

things. So, yes, we all can do more than what we do.

I believe happiness is a state of mind. It has nothing to do with money. Perhaps it's my upbringing. My parents were small-scale farmers in Himachal Pradesh. I learned honesty, integrity, and hard work from them.



### Brief Bio

Jay Chaudhry has founded a series of successful companies, including AirDefense, CipherTrust, CoreHarbor, SecureIT, and Zscaler, which became a public company in 2018. He has a history of introducing innovations that address the demand for securely enabling emerging technology trends.

Jay has received many accolades for his accomplishments including Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of The Year twice.

He earned an MBA in Marketing, an MS in Computer Engineering, and an MS in Industrial Engineering – all from the University of Cincinnati, Ohio. He also completed the Executive Management Program from Harvard Business School.

In India, he studied Electronics Engineering at IIT BHU Varanasi.

## Million Dollar Donors

# Giving generously for a noble cause served by a disciplined and passionate team

## Shri Hasubhai and Smt. Hershaben Shah

Philanthropist Shri Hasubhai P Shah is the Chairman Emeritus of the Hersha Hospitality Trust.

He began in the hospitality industry with the purchase of a single hotel in Harrisburg, PA, in 1984 and over the last 36 years, expanded his chain to include management of over 110 hotels across many states in the US.

In 2002, Hasubhai Shah was introduced to Sankara by Dr. R.V. Ramani of SEF, India. Inspired by his spiritual guru



Shri Krishna Shankar Shastri "to serve the community in the area of healthcare", he began by sponsoring eye surgeries for Sankara.

"When I met people from SEF, USA, I was extremely impressed with how they were running the organization. It is a great cause that Sankara is serving by going to the villages and giving eyesight to the poor and needy. We can change the lives of so many people, especially in the poor districts," he said.

"The other thing that motivates me to support Sankara is the people behind the organization and how selflessly they are serving the cause. Their dedication is very impressive."

## Dr. Yeturu Aahlad and Dr. Subha Aahlad



Dr. Yeturu Aahlad is a successful entrepreneur and a distinguished computer scientist in Silicon Valley. His wife, Dr. Subha Aahlad, is a pediatrician. They have been looking to pay it forward and give back to the community. During one of the off-site IIT Madras alumni events, Aahlad connected with his classmate, K. Sridharan, Founder and President of SEF, USA, and learned about bringing vision to the needy.

Aahlad and Subha had four criteria for deciding on the organizations they would support: nobility of the cause, personal connection, passion of the organization

team, and commitment from its team and leaders. The couple did their due diligence on SEF, USA and the personal connection to Sridharan made it easier for them to decide to support SEF, USA.

Aahlad said that they were impressed with the way SEF, USA, and its volunteers met his criteria. They also felt that the steady growth in the number of free eye surgeries for the rural blind every year and the consistent top rating from Charity Navigator for fiscal discipline were testaments to the fact that SEF, USA is a well-run charity.

So, Aahlad and Subha made a major contribution in 2017, helping SEF, USA meet its fundraising goals for the year.

## Manoj Shekar Owner, TCS Industries, Rochester, NY



Manoj Shekar is a long-time donor to SEF, USA, who made a major contribution in 2022 for the expansion of the Sankara Eye Hospital in Guntur, Andhra Pradesh.



# Partners-in-Service

*Inspirational messages from prominent people who made significant voluntary contributions to specific Sankara hospital projects in addition to making large donations.*

## Shri Harshadbhai and Smt. Nainaben Patel



ly, a charity needs funds for maintenance; they can grow big but they still need money to maintain it. But Sankara found a solution to that problem and they went about it systematically. So that was fascinating to me.”

That motivated Harshadbhai and Nainaben to support Sankara’s Anand hospital in Gujarat, and they went on to become the single largest donor for the Anand hospital.

Over the years, Harshadbhai and Nainaben offered matching donations for several Sankara fundraisers which encouraged more people to donate. They also got other family members and relatives become big supporters of Sankara.

Harshadbhai also started Sankara’s Southern California chapter in Los Angeles and brought in artists like Sonu Nigam, Hariharan, Shreya Ghoshal, and Nitin Mukesh to perform at big fundraiser events which were quite successful, creating a big pool of donors for Sankara.

Harshadbhai and Nainaben Patel’s association with Sankara Eye Foundation, USA goes back to the mid-2000s when their friend Ram Dutt, a volunteer with Sankara introduced them to Divyogi Patel and Murali Krishnamurthy.

On visiting the Coimbatore hospital, Harshadbhai and Nainaben met Dr. Ramani a couple of times and were very impressed with the operations there. “One of the things that fascinated me”, says Harshadbhai, “was that Sankara was running the organization not like a charity but like a business. They had a business plan, they had a self-sufficiency plan, which is very unusual for a charity. Usual-

## Dr. Ramamohana R. Kancherla



with it. Sankara’s end-to-end program, taking people from the villages, treating them and bringing them back, is very impressive to me.

“I met Dr. Ramani and was impressed with his work and then met Murali and the others. I donated to Sankara and then began fundraising for them. I would gather some friends and we would be hosting booths, distributing literature, getting people together, and supporting the organiza-

tion in any way we could.” Over the years, Dr. Kancherla has been a big donor to many of Sankara’s hospital projects and has also rallied other donors to the cause. Notable contributions have been a 25-bed ward in the name of his parents and, an eye bank in the name of his father-in-law, to the Guntur project.

As chairman of the alumni committee at the medical college he studied in Guntur, Dr. Kancherla also facilitated the participation of Sankara in alumni reunions with over 1,000 doctors in attendance in Dallas and California. “It is all about the cause, the people we serve. The people in SEF are wonderful. They can motivate hundreds of people to volunteer, which is amazing. I will continue to support Sankara in any way I can in the future as well,” he says.

“On the 25th milestone anniversary of Sankara, I wish them all the best and hope they can fulfill Vision 2030.”

## Shri B.V. Jagadeesh and Smt. Anuradha Jagadeesh

Shri B.V. Jagadeesh is a Silicon Valley-based tech entrepreneur with several technology startups to his credit. His wife, Smt. Anuradha Jagadeesh, has also held leadership positions in technology companies in the Bay Area besides being a leader of India Community Center’s Sevathon.

Their journey with Sankara Eye Foundation, USA began in the early 2000s when they sponsored a fundraising musical jugalbandi event for the organization, saying, “The cause and the message are all truly inspiring.”

There has been no looking back for the couple. Jagadeesh describes it as “a very pleasant jour-

ney, a fun relationship” being associated with Sankara and its leaders - Murali Krishnamurthy, K. Sridharan, R. Sundar and Dr. Ramani – “all outstanding people, very sincere, hardworking, committed. It’s very hard to find that in non-profits.”

In 2004-2005, Jagadeesh made a keynote speech at a Sankara event in San Jose, where he presented the problem of curable blindness in a different way - by looking at the economics behind it. “A simple thing like a cataract makes people unable to see because they cannot afford the surgery, and because of that they are dependent on someone else for everything in life. So, two people -

the sufferer and the caregiver - are unable to work and contribute to the family economy. Given the sheer scale of the problem and the number of patients Sankara is serving, even if 50% get their eyesight back and go back to work, it would make a huge impact on the family economy and a difference of a few billion dollars to the GDP.”

The Jagadeesh family whose roots are in Bangalore also contributed in a big way to the establishment of the Bangalore hospital and training center project for nurses and optometrists by galvanizing the Kannada Koota of Northern California (KKNC) and Association of Kannada Kootas of

## Shri Jayaram Komati



Prominent community leader and philanthropist Jayaram Komati Garu has been a big supporter of SEF, USA. He rallied the Telugu community to support the Guntur hospital project generously. As convenor of the Telugu Association of North America (TANA) convention in 2003 in San Jose, CA, he opened the convention for the promotion of the Guntur project, which helped raise awareness and significant funds for the project.

In the same year, he also suggested a ‘Wall of Founders’ banquet dinner which became a template for Sankara’s annual banquet ever since.

For all his support and gener-

ous donations, Sankara Eye Foundation, USA recognizes Jayaram Garu as a Partner-in-Service for the Guntur hospital in Andhra Pradesh. He also donated generously and helped significantly with the kick-off fundraising event for Sankara hospital project in Hyderabad.

## Smt. Vijaya Asuri of BATA



unteers across the USA, Vijaya opines. “It is a model organization that has demonstrated to its donor base and supporters that great things can be achieved when you work relentlessly toward a cause. It is always a pleasure to work together and promote a cause with SEF, USA.”

BATA, she points out, has been an integral part of the fundraising efforts for the Guntur hospital since it was planned in 2002. “We supported the project through fundraiser events and annual cricket tournaments. We also worked with Sankara to organize a kick-off fundraiser for SEF Hyderabad Hospital and are proud to be Partners in Service in both hospitals.

“The results of the BATA team and SEF team working together seamlessly are evident in the successful operation of SEF Guntur and Hyderabad Hospitals.”

Heartly congratulations to Sankara Eye Foundation, USA on being honored as Organization of the Year, says Vijaya Aasuri. “SEF and Bay Area Telugu Association (BATA) have been working together for over two decades in raising funds and awareness of Sankara’s Guntur hospital and more recently for the Hyderabad hospital as well.

SEF, USA continues to achieve its vision due to the hard work and dedication of the selfless vol-



America (AKKA) to get involved in the fundraising and by setting up a matching fund of \$100,000 to encourage donors, raising a total of over \$200,000. He inspires and promotes SEF wherever he goes.

“I have been an evangelist

for Sankara over the years and right now Sankara has tremendous momentum. The machinery is extremely well operating, we are happy to spread the message about their work. We believe in this cause,” says Jagadeesh.



# Congratulations and Commendations

Welcoming the nomination of Sankara Eye Foundation, USA as the Organization of the Year 2023 by The South Asian Times, a few messages from the supporters of the charity that enjoys a pristine reputation.

## Ram Reddy Bay Area entrepreneur



What resonates most for me is how the Sankara Eye Foundation operates. Their hospitals follow an amazingly well-run 80/20 framework that provides the same quality service to 80% free and 20% paid patients. They have it down to a fine science with such granularity and perfection that it is replicated across all their hospitals with ease and precision.

And SEF's massive volunteer network and tens of thousands of annual donors add impetus to this grassroots movement. I'm proud to have been a supporter for over 15 years. Their social impact is immediate and lasts a lifetime for every patient who has

vision restored. Patients quickly return to becoming productive members of society and providers for the family. The elderly achieve independence, adding to their self-esteem.

SEF receives advocacy, support, and endorsements from many corners of the world. To name a few - Amitabh Kant, Sherpa, G20 India, Anand Mahindra - Chairman, Mahindra, Mallika Chopra of Chopra Foundation, late Rakesh Jhunjwala - India's business icon, Jay Chaudhry - Chairman, Zscaler, Amit Walia - CEO, Informatica, Chandar Pattabhiram - ex-CMO Marketo and Coupa, and Aruna Ravichandran - CMO, WebEx.

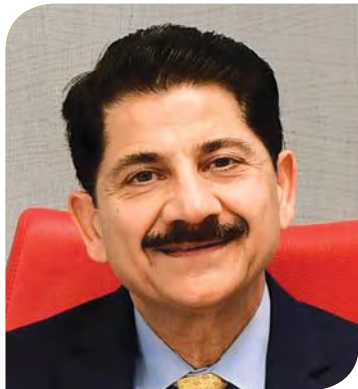
## Achyuth Reddy Civil Engineer, Hyderabad



It is no surprise to learn that the Sankara Eye Foundation, USA has been nominated as the Organization of the Year by The South Asian Times. Over the past 25 years, the passion and dedication of its founders, together with an army of enthusiastic volunteers, have had a huge positive impact on community eye care across India. That SEF can do this with such a consistently high level of professionalism, integrity, and transparency is remarkable.

As SEF embarks on the audacious 'March to a Million' goal of performing one million free eye surgeries a year by 2030, I wish them continued success.

## Mohan Wanchoo Chairman, ECIMW Holding Co, Inc, NY Philanthropist



It is my great pleasure to say a few words of appreciation about Sankara Eye Foundation, USA, and its Founder and Executive Chairman, Mr. Murali Krishnamurthy.

India is home to the largest number of blind people in the world, where nearly 40 million people are blind or visually impaired. Fortunately, nearly 80% of them can easily be cured if they can receive proper, timely treatment. Every year 1 million new visually impaired people get added to the already huge number of visually challenged people in India. The rate at which Sankara is performing eye surgeries currently is not adequate to meet the

Murali's passion for Sankara is also motivated by his rare eye disorder for which he had an operation last year. He could have received the best eye treatment in California where he lives, yet so deep is his trust in Sankara that he traveled to India and got his operation done in the Sankara hospital in Coimbatore, where he underwent a corneal transplant. This shows how he truly believes in the organization he supports. As they say, he puts his money where his mouth is.

Sankara is forging ahead under Murali's dynamic and able leadership. They are proudly running 12 of their own eye hospitals and 14 more eye hospitals in partnership with other organizations that share Sankara's vision with a passion.

I am very fortunate to be associated with Sankara and Murali and wish them the very best in the future.

## Dr Rajendra Modi Ophthalmologist, Community leader, NY



Sankara Eye Foundation, USA is the biggest and most reputed charitable organization in India for eye diseases. It has the highest rating (4/4) on Charity Navigator.

I met Murali Krishnamurthy and Sundar Radhakrishnan about five years ago. I also met Dr. R.V. Ramani, founder of Sankara Eye

Foundation, India. He is a noble and simple man. At the time Sankara was planning to open a hospital in Jodhpur but finally settled for Jaipur. We collected funds for this hospital through RANA (Rajasthan Association of North America). Together, we organized many fundraisers for the noble cause.

I have visited many Sankara eye hospitals in India. All of them are run efficiently. Their 80-20 system ensures each hospital is self-sufficient.

Anybody who comes to Sankara camps is treated free and with dignity for cataract surgery. We have been holding successful eye camps every month in my hometown, Neem Ka Thana in Rajasthan, for the last five years. All the patients and their families return home happy.

Sankara's ambitious goal of doing 1 million free surgeries by 2030 is reachable because of their founders and leaders like Sundar ji and Murali ji. I wish them godspeed.

# SEF Executive Chairman's Thank You Note

By Murali Krishnamurthy

It has been a long and rewarding journey. Initially, when we started to support free eye surgeries at Sankara's hospital in Coimbatore around the year 2020, we could raise only about \$100,000 a year. Last year, we targeted \$2 M!

There are too many supporters and donors to thank, but I will mention a few from our early days and a few key players who made possible our newest hospital in Hyderabad.

**Vijaya Aasuri** has been a leader at the Bay Area Telugu Association (BATA). The entire BATA Team and the SEF Bay Area Volunteers have been



Narayana Kala brought many of his friends to SEF

working together for the past 20+ years. We used to set up booths at all their events.

When we embarked on our

first replication of the Coimbatore eye hospital in Guntur, AP, my colleague at Remedy Corp., **Narayana Kala**, brought many of his friends (many from AP) to SEF.

In 2003, the Telugu Association of North America (TANA)'s Convention took place in the Bay Area. It worked out very well for building our Guntur hospital. Narayana Kala's friends including our board member **Venkat Maddipati** and many others worked hard for the success of the convention and TANA opened the event to promote SEF and our Guntur project.

**Jayaram Komati** was TANA convener and he appealed to all the participants to go all out for SEF. We had a prominent booth and placed our promotional

material in Convention Registration bags. Vijaya Aasuri organized a Light Music event and auctioned songs to benefit the Guntur hospital. This association helped launch our journey in India.

**Hema Chamraj** and a small group of volunteers came up with a template for such partnerships and we applied that to all our capital projects including Karnataka, Gujarat, and Punjab.

**Ram Reddy** has been our supporter for a long time. He played a critical role in SEF entering Telangana by introducing us to the then Minister KT Rama Rao Garu who was instrumental in offering us leased land at a nominal cost to build our Hyderabad eye hospital. It was inaugurated last year.

Ram is a Bay Area entrepreneur and former TiE President. He organized an online event called SEF-Envision-2020 and brought in several distinguished leaders from India and the USA. He is also a \$100K+ donor.

**Achyuth Reddy** is a classmate of my brother Sridharan from IIT Madras. A civil engineer, he played a key role in raising the Hyderabad hospital by bringing several \$100K donors, planning the inauguration, interacting with the officials, and helping us meet building codes including fire safety.

Dr. R.V. Ramani, Ram Reddy, Achyuth Reddy and Venkat Maddipati used to have at least one meeting every fortnight to plan the entire project. I used to join occasionally.

Thank you, all.

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# Sankara carries on the legacy of founders Dr R.V. Ramani and Dr Radha Ramani to ensure world-class eye care to all

**W**hat causes blindness? Can it be cured? Dr Kaushik Murali, President, Medical Administration at Sankara Eye Foundation India, is the best person to ask such questions.

While conceding that complete vision loss cannot be restored at present, he says that blindness can be prevented, which is the mission of Sankara. "As the population ages and systemic diseases develop, vision impairment will continue to emerge. We can only reduce the burden and ensure there is no backlog."

Sankara's mission, Dr Kaushik elaborates, is ensuring curable blindness is treated and where possible preventable causes are addressed. "Our Gift of Vision, rural outreach eyecare program, is very structured and has been active since 1990. This model eliminates the barriers of availability, access, and affordability. We also run 'Rainbow' preventive eye care program for children and diabetic retinopathy screening program."

Blindness can be caused by a variety of conditions and at different stages of a person's life, explains Dr Kaushik. Genetic conditions could cause cataracts, structural changes in parts of the eye that result in blindness. Preterm

children with certain contributing factors can develop conditions of the retina resulting at times in blindness. As the child grows, refractive errors (needing spectacle correction) can develop. Amblyopia or 'lazy eye' also causes vision impairment. With age, diabetes, hypertension, and other autoimmune diseases can cause eye problems. Cataract and retinal degeneration develop. Glaucoma, corneal blindness, and ocular tumors are other eye conditions of concern.

Dr Kaushik says that he was exposed to Sankara as a student at a school that held eye screening camps. He earned his post graduation in Ophthalmology at Sankara Eye Hospital in Coimbatore in 2000. In 2008, when Sankara Eye Hospital opened in Bangalore, he returned to the city he grew up in.

As President, Medical Administration since 2014, his role encompasses:

- Implement processes to effectively manage clinical policies implemented uniformly across the Sankara group.
- Work with the medical team to develop and implement efficient standards, protocols, processes, decision support systems, reporting and benchmarks that support ongoing improvements of clinical operations, and promote quality eye care.



**Dr Kaushik Murali**

President, Medical Administration,

Sankara Eye Foundation, India

- Utilize business intelligence information through management information systems to plan deployment and resource allocation.
- Develop Sankara Academy of Vision into a center of excellence in eye care training, research, and consultancy.
- Act as a thought leader in ophthalmology, providing the organization with information to retain relevance and identify opportunities.
- Enable rollout of new centers in

keeping with the organizational Vision 2030.

- Accountable for ensuring compliance with accreditation and regulatory requirements for all healthcare services.
- Adherence to faculty requirements, curriculum, and regulatory needs for all courses.

His role is confined to Sankara's 13 hospitals, but some of the partner institutions pay them visits to understand their successful process and systems.

Sankara Eye Hospitals, he says, "carry on the legacy of our founders Dr R.V. Ramani and Dr Radha Ramani to ensure world-class eye care to all irrespective of where you stay. We continue to proactively provide access through our hospitals, vision centers, or our outreach eye care camps."

Taking a senior leadership course at Insead in France helped Dr Kaushik evolve as a leader, understand the best industry practices, and bring that learning into operations at Sankara. "During COVID we were able to ensure safety and keep our operations running, often being ahead of the wave in preparedness."

The strategic management program he did at Harvard brought together nonprofits from across the world. One of them was the Orpheus Symphony, which follows

a model of distributed leadership sans the orchestra conductor. Says Dr Kaushik, "At our newer units we do not announce the leader. Doctors step in for specific tasks to take leadership roles in areas they are particularly trained in or have a natural flair. Over time we can identify leadership. This model reaffirmed the strong governance system we have in India and see mirrored in SEF USA."

To realize Vision 2030, Dr Kaushik sees Sankara's hospitals ramping up their free eye surgery capacity to 425,000 a year by then. "Ensuring that every surgery is performed adhering to the norms and enabling optimum recovery would be our focus. After all, each beneficiary is a human being, not a number."



**Brief Bio**

Dr Kaushik Murali has an MBBS from Kasturba Medical College, Mangalore, a DNB from Sankara Eye Hospital, Coimbatore, and Pediatric Ophthalmology at Sankara Netralaya. He also took management programs at Insead, France, and Harvard Business School. He has collaborated with institutions such as the Harvard School of Public Health, University of Bonn, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Health on public health research projects. He was part of the Core Committee organizing the G20 Young Entrepreneur Alliance meet in India in 2023.

## Systems and processes have contributed to the success of Sankara

**B**harath Balasubramaniam's biggest contribution to Sankara's mission of preventing needless blindness is SERVIS (Sankara Electronic Remote Vision Information System) app. He developed it as an offline mobile-based application that is used to collect eye health data during household surveys:

- To focus on improving the efficiency of eye care intervention projects.
- To increase the data accuracy for reporting and decision-making.
- To predict the prevalence of eye-related disease.

At the micro level, Bharat explains, the fieldworker enters the patient details into the app. That information gets saved and synced to the central server through the internet. The on-the-spot QR code generated helps to track the patient at all stages. The database can then



**Bharath Balasubramaniam**

President, Operations & Administration, Sankara Eye Foundation, India

be analyzed at the organizational level to understand the field processes and community response.

SERVIS app, Bharat says proudly, "has helped focus on strategiz-

ing community eye care intervention at Sankara and in improving the efficiency of the Gift of Vision program of SEF USA."

Bharath has been associated with Sankara since 1994, first as a volunteer in the Sankara Youth Wing. In 2006, he took up the role of Administrator. Since 2014 he has been working as President, Operations & Administration. Sankara Eye Foundation has a roster of 2,800 employees, among them 400 are doctors.

Says he, "I am responsible for ensuring the success of the Community Outreach Program of Sankara and making it into a self-sustaining model. We monitor and support the performance of various units across India. Our role is to improve productivity at eye camps and minimize dropouts in the post-operative reviews."

The operations and admin head is also responsible for the exe-

cution of new projects as well as technology implementation and upgrades. He has to engage the donors at various stages through communication on fund allocation and utilization to meet objectives and targets achieved at the unit level and corporate level.

The department under Bharath focuses on the 13 Sankara hospitals. Says he, "Technology has enabled us to scale to multiple locations across the country. All data, voice, and video between the units is seamless and real-time. A patient registered in one Sankara can visit any other Sankara Eye Hospital without carrying any paper because the medical records are available through the Cloud. Our OPD is predominantly paperless with electronic medical records capturing and reporting patient information."

Bharat believes that the systems and processes they have put in place at Sankara have ensured

that the passion of the founders and the purpose of the organization is converted to results. "Clear job description, key performance indicators, constant review, and monitoring have been important for our growth."

He sees Sankara India well poised to contribute 425,000+ free eye surgeries towards SEF-USA's Vision 2030.



**Brief Bio**

Bharath Balasubramaniam has developed the award-winning app SERVIS and is focused on automating every step of eye care outreach. He was recognized as an Eye Health Leader by the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness in 2014. In 2018, he was honored for Social Impact by the British Council Alumni Awards.

Besides a master's in Computer Applications, Bharath has a master's in Hospital Administration from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences and an MSc in Community Eye Health from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

He is part of the board of SDMH, a 500-bed multi-specialty hospital in Jaipur, and NGOs including Round Table India that works to construct classrooms in government schools and provide artificial limbs.



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# SEF USA's Partner Hospitals add free eye surgery capacity

Partner Hospitals constitute the growth engine for Sankara Eye Foundation, USA's Vision 2030: March to a Million.

From supporting one eye hospital in Coimbatore Sankara Eye Foundation, USA has become the world's largest free eye-care and eye-surgery initiative! The strategy of partnering with existing like-minded eye hospitals is paying dividends.

SEF, USA has supported a total of 528,000 free cataract surgeries in nine hospitals (navratna) since 2017-18 when the Partner Program began. The program serves the most needy states: Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, Uttarakhand and Odisha.

## OpEx Partners

The hospitals to which SEF, USA provides operational costs have a combined free cataract surgery capacity of 70,000 annually. They are:

1. MGM Eye Institute (Raipur, Chhattisgarh) – annual free cataract surgery capacity: 10,000
2. RKM Vivekananda Netralaya (Dehradun, Uttarakhand) – free cataract surgery capacity: 15,000
3. Siliguri Greater Lions Eye Hospital (Siliguri, West Bengal) – free cataract surgery capacity: 15,000
4. Nanritam Lokeswarananda Eye Hospital (Purulia, West Bengal) - free cataract surgery capacity: 15,000
5. Vision India Foundation, Trilochan Netralaya (Sambalpur, Odisha) free cataract surgery capacity: 15,000

## CapEx Partners

The hospitals to which SEF, USA has been providing Capital Expenditure (CapEx) have a combined free cataract surgery capacity of 380,000 annually. They are:

1. AJEH Center of Excellence (Mastichak, Bihar) – free cataract surgery capacity: 210,000. (Profiled on page 31)
2. PBMA (Pune and Solapur, Maharashtra) - free cataract surgery capacity: 75,000
3. KKM (Mathura, UP): free cataract surgery capacity: 60,000
4. NEH (Purulia, West Bengal) - free cataract surgery capacity: 35,000

## PBMA's HV Desai Eye Hospital, Pune

The Poona Blind Men's Association was established in 1952 by



T.S. Bamankar, who was visually impaired. Niranjana Pandya joined PBMA in 1966 and spearheaded many projects with other nonprofits.

PBMA's 95-bed H.V. Desai Eye Hospital came up in Pune in 2000. It is NABH accredited and has received acclaim nationally and internationally. Their Kantaxmi Shah Eye Hospital in Nandurbar followed in 2007 and the Shankarseth Sabale Eye Hospital in Solapur is in progress.

### Association with SEF USA

SEF USA onboarded PBMA as a partner hospital in 2021-22 and has funded 8,000 free cataract surgeries. It has provided/committed CapEx funding of Rs 26 crore for the Pune and Solapur projects. That would increase the free cataract surgery capacity at the two locations to 75,000 annually.

The HV Desai Eye Hospital is adding wards for free cataract patients to double the free patient capacity from 25,000 to 55,000 annually. Of the CapEx layout of

about Rs 20 crore, SEF USA contributed Rs 10 crore.

PBMA's eye care vertical has a flourishing paid surgery practice making it operationally self-sufficient.

**Services offered:** Cataract, glaucoma, retina, oculoplasty, cornea, and related procedures like squint.

**Leadership:** Parvez Billimoria is the Executive Director of HV Desai Eye Hospital. Nitin Desai is the Chairman of the hospital and PBMA.

### Kalyanam Karoti, Mathura (KKM)

KKM is a charitable organization focused on improving the quality of life for the disabled and marginalized community in India through affordable and accessible treatment, education, surgery, and rehabilitation.

KKM started its eye hospital named **Shree Jee Baba Chikitsaa Sansthan** in 1996. Their operations include an orthopedic and prosthetics center and a school

for those with learning disabilities and hearing impairment.

KKM has been providing free eye surgeries to the indigent with a 90:10 ratio of free: paid cataract surgeries. After the growing realization of their inability to rely on external donations, they are moving to a more balanced approach. For outreach, they organize 20+ monthly camps at predetermined locations.

### Association with SEF USA

SEF USA onboarded KKM as a partner hospital in 2019-20 with an initial funding tranche for 5,000 surgeries. Realizing that KKM had a database of patients needing surgeries, had capacity and manpower, but lacked funding. SEF USA has funded a total of 23,000 free cataract surgeries over the years.

KKM has embarked on an ambitious hospital project in the Mathura area, which will become the new tertiary eye hospital. It will have an annual free surgery capacity of 60,000 in its 1st phase, to be further increased in the 2nd

phase. Of its CapEx outlay of Rs 45 crore, SEF USA committed Rs 30 crore.

KKM plans to continue developing its paid surgery practice to achieve self-sufficiency over five years. In the interim, they will focus on expanding their donor base to help with ongoing operating expenses.

**Services offered:** Cataract, glaucoma, cornea and related procedures like squint.

**Leadership:** Sunil Kumar Sharma is the Chairman.

### Netaji Eye Hospital (NEH), Purulia

Netaji Eye Hospital traces its roots to 1938 when Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, during the freedom struggle, implored his comrade Annada Prasad Chakraborty (the pre-sanyas name of Swami Asimananda) to address the problem of blindness among the destitute population of Purulia district in West Bengal.

From early camp-based treatment in 1953 to a 10-bed eye hospital in 1954 to its current 100-bed facility in Ramchandrapur village, NEH has a rich history of providing quality eye care and surgeries in areas of West Bengal, Jharkhand and Bihar under the aegis of Sri Sri Bijoykrishna Ashram Relief Society.

### Association with SEF USA

NEH has recently completed a major renovation project at its base hospital in Ramchandrapur, increasing the free surgery capacity from 12,000 annually to 34,000. The Capital Expenditure outlay was Rs 6.4 crore, of which SEF USA contributed Rs 5.2 crore. Plans are to provide family accommodation in Asansol for doctors. From the outlay of Rs 2 crore, SEF USA is expected to contribute Rs 1.5 crore.

SEF USA onboarded NEH in 2019-20 and has supported a total of 40,000 free surgeries. An initial pilot funding tranche of Rs 40 lakh during 2019-20 was used by NEH for purchasing 2 buses for transporting camp patients to the hospital for free surgeries.

**Services offered:** Cataract & IOL, glaucoma, cornea, vitreo-retinal, comprehensive eye check-up and pediatric eye care, ocular microbiology, in-house medicine center, and optical dispensing.

**Leadership Team:** Himadri Sekhar Chakraborty is General Secretary & CEO Netaji Eye Hospitals.



# SEF, USA has helped AJEH 1.0 reinvent as AJEH 2.0

**Mritunjay Kumar Tiwary**, founder of AJEH, has the challenge of delivering 200,000 free eye surgeries annually to their partner, Sankara Eye Foundation, USA. But he is confident of success. He spoke to *The South Asian Times* about his motivation and mission.



## Mritunjay Kumar Tiwary Founder, Project Head & Executive Trustee Akhand Jyoti Eye Hospital (AJEH)



### Q Tell us about the beginnings of your journey.

A My involvement with rural eye care started about 20 years back when I came to the village of Mastichak, near Patna in Bihar, and met Pandit Ramesh Ji (also known as Shukla Baba), one of the first disciples of Acharya Shriram Sharma, the founder of Gayatri Pariwar. He inspired me to think about giving back to the poorest sections of society. Being in Mastichak at the time, I decided to start the hospital there. We began with 10 beds in the local temple premises.

### Q Why choose blindness as your cause?

A On one of my earlier visits to Bihar, I met a blind farmer along with his 10-year-old daughter. He was turned away from a local district hospital because there was no eye surgeon there. In India, a farmer retires when he dies or is incapacitated, and the biggest cause of incapacitation is blindness. So, this person lost his eyesight and his livelihood, but more importantly, his daughter was also pulled out of school to take care of him. That made me realize that restoring eyesight is important for restoring livelihoods.

### Q How has your relationship with SEF, USA helped AJEH?

A In 2017 we became partners of SEF, USA. With Sankara, we learned how to bring in professionalism and dynamism into the project while keeping the spiritual foundation strongly intact. Our first project together was building the Akhand Jyoti Center of Excellence (AJCOE), which was inaugurated in October 2023 - a 500-bed state-of-the-art facility. The strong backing of SEF, USA has helped AJEH 1.0 reinvent as AJEH 2.0. The key element is that they bought into our philosophy, understood our model, and supported us.

### Q What is the Football to Eyeball program?

A It is the flagship program of AJEH. Poverty and blindness have a cause-and-effect relationship. But when both are present together, women are also marginalized. So to uplift rural women, we started this program for their education, employment, and reformation. Our first pillar of focus is eye health - we know it well, know the implementation, and we've not even scratched the surface as far as the scale of the problem is concerned.

Our second pillar is commitment to low-income geographies. All our hospitals are in villages, among paddy fields.

Third, women will be at the core of everything we do. Hence, the Football to Eyeball program. I used to be a professional footballer and one day at a local school, I saw three girls in salwar suits kicking around a roll of paper. I asked them what they were doing and they said, "We are playing football." They used to see the boys play in the football field, but they could not go and play.

I thought then that we could use football as an icebreaker to draw out girls from their houses and help them train. But it took almost six months for the first girl to come in, because there was so much taboo.

We had to offer an incentive. We said, "If you allow your girl to play football and send her to a hostel, we will sponsor the cost of her education and help her become an optometrist," which here they think is a junior doctor. We also made the condition that the girls would not be married off before the age of 21. It was then the girls slowly started coming. Today about 50 to 60 girls play at state levels. With the optometry course as a backbone of the program, the girls can earn for themselves once they become optometrists.

### Q What are your expansion plans at AJEH?

A Every year we screen and give primary care to more than 500,000 people. This year we aim to do 100,000 surgeries out

## Akhand Jyoti Eye Hospital



AJEH main hospital in Mastichak village in Bihar is among the top five charitable eye care hospitals in India

Akhand Jyoti Eye Hospital is owned and run by the Yugrishi Shriram Sharma Acharya Charitable Trust. Performing over 70,000 surgeries annually, of which 80% are free to the poor, it is the largest eye hospital in Eastern India. Driven by a compassionate and experienced team of doctors and clinical staff, Akhand Jyoti Eye Hospital has been working for the last 17+ years, towards eliminating curable blindness from Bihar by providing comprehensive, accessible, high-quality eye care services to people in low-income areas.

The hospital was started in December 2006 at the village Mastichak, 60 km from Patna, Bihar. This year, AJEH inaugurated its 'Centre of Excellence', a 500-bed facility in Mastichak. Akhand Jyoti Eye Hospital focuses on restoring the vision of blind patients due to cataracts with the belief that restoring vision also restores the dignity, hope and livelihood of the person.

Today its mission is to spearhead in Bihar the elimination of curable blindness by 2026 and lay the foundations of financial sustainability of operations post 2026.

of which about 80% are free. We have five surgical centers of varying sizes, the largest being the AJCOE.

Following the lead of Sankara, we have also developed our own Vision 2030. Between 2022 and 2030, we aspire to do a cumulative 2 million eye surgeries, of which 1.6 million will be free. So this decade, we plan to do at least 200,000 free surgeries annually. We also aim to be self-sufficient by 2030.

Our mission has always been to make Bihar blindness free. Bihar has the third largest population in India, so there is a huge cluster of blindness and visual impairment. It is also the poorest state, so the combined problem is immense.

You may have the noblest of causes, but only when you have a partner who supports you in every manner can you achieve something on a big scale. With Sankara as our partner, we can scale up. More importantly, we want to serve patients irrespective of their capacity to pay. That is the legacy we hope to create.



AJEH's 'Football to Eyeball' talent creation initiative aims to tackle the problem of child marriage and gender inequality in Bihar by providing equal opportunities and employment to girls from rural areas.



### Brief Bio

Mritunjay Kumar Tiwary is the founder and Head of Projects at the Akhand Jyoti Eye Hospital (AJEH), Mastichak, Bihar. He started AJEH with a strong belief that eye health delivered innovatively can alleviate poverty, improve gender parity, and enhance social capital in the low-income states of India. AJEH, one of the top 5 charitable eye hospitals in India today, offers world-class eye care services, including all sub-specialties, and performs over 65,000 surgeries annually, 80% of which are free, and impacts the lives of one million people every year.

Their 'Football to Eyeball' talent creation initiative aims to tackle the problem of child marriage and gender inequality in Bihar by providing equal opportunities and employment to girls from rural areas. 140 girls have so far been trained under this program and 30 are being added to the scheme every year. Mritunjay was given the Reliance - CNN IBN Real Heroes Award in 2010 for this initiative.



# Executive Council is the action arm of Sankara, USA

*The Executive Committee functions as the driving force to translate the directives and strategies outlined by the Sankara Board into actions and results. EC acts as a bridge between the strategic decisions made at the higher level and their execution to achieve organizational goals.*

**Four volunteer members of the Executive Council talk about their motivation in working for Sankara and how they identify with its mission and vision.**



**Hema Chamraj**  
EC Member

I was introduced to SEF, USA, and motivated to join the cause by my husband, Rajiv Chamraj, who was collaborating with SEF, USA leaders on developing a bold vision to eradicate curable blindness.

Since I was fluent in multiple languages including Telugu, I volunteered to lead the Guntur project in Andhra Pradesh with Shri Narayana Kala. To make headway, we needed to bring the Telugu community on board and ensure they felt aligned with the cause. We formed a team of like-minded people from the Telugu community along with other SEF, USA

volunteers and created a focus group called 'Focus AP - 750K' to collaborate and raise \$750,000 for the Guntur project.

We approached leading Telugu associations like Telugu Association of North America (TANA), the American Telugu Association (ATA), and the Bay Area Telugu Association (BATA). We identified community champions like Shri Jayaram Komati to provide a fundraising platform. Together we found creative ways to raise funds, meet HNI (high net worth) donors, and motivate the community. We exceeded our targets and raised more than \$1 million for the Guntur project.

Leveraging community support became a template for fundraising for all future hospitals where we enabled the community to own the cause and raise funds.

I continued to drive hospital fundraising for SEF's Bangalore and Shimoga hospitals using the same best practices. As an EC member, I wanted to be involved in strategy, operations, and marketing. I moved towards driving the marketing activities, developing content, and disseminating it through multiple channels like web, social media, print and TV.

I will continue to collaborate with the team to drive Vision2030 towards success.



**Smita Patel**  
EC Member

In 2006, Divyogi Patel, a close family friend from our days in Africa, was working on expanding SEF to Anand, Gujarat, and invited me to the first Focus Gujarat meeting at his house. It was inspirational to know that our efforts could make a huge difference in the people suffering needlessly from blindness. After that, there was no turning back.

I was blown away by the amazing work done by the dedicated volunteers in the US and the staff in India. Just the thought that a simple surgery costing only \$30 could give someone a new

lease on life was very empowering.

For the first few years, we worked on raising awareness and funds to build the Sankara Hospital in Anand by traveling all over the country, attending conventions by the American Asian Hotel Owners Association (AAHOA), AAPI, New York's India Independence Day Parade, etc and everywhere we developed great relationships for SEF and collected donations for the Anand Hospital.

Coming from a Biochemistry background, volunteering for SEF has given me opportunities to learn new skills in marketing, computing, graphic design and by putting my scientific detail-oriented training to use. I love coming up with innovative ways to help things move for the team. After the Anand Hospital opened in 2008, I have continued to help with managing SEF marketing, collateral, and events for all our US chapters.

SEF is a wonderful second family for me and it is an honor to be working with dedicated volunteers who put their heart and soul into this noble organization and make a huge difference in the lives of thousands of underprivileged folks who need our help.



**Sonal Solanki**  
EC Member

There is a saying that when you are down, lift someone up. That is how

my volunteering with Sankara began - after a personal tragedy.

In 2004, I lost my father in a car accident. Devastated by grief I knew I had to find a meaningful way to deal with the loss.

My mother suggested volunteering with Sankara. So, in 2005, I reached out to SEF, USA's founder, Murali Krishnamurthy, and his wife, Kala Murali. During that long conversation with both about Sankara's work, I found my cause.

Muraliji and Kalaji were very passionate about Sankara. At that time the Sankara Eye Hospital project in Anand, Gujarat, was in the works. I met a lot of volunteers and was amazed by their enthusiasm and dedication.

The rest, as they say, is history. I initially

started volunteering thinking that I would be able to make people's lives better. Little did I know then that this work would enrich my own life and bring so much happiness to me. What I have received from Sankara is way more than what I might have given back!

As an accounting professional, I was also greatly impressed by Sankara's transparency, accountability, and feedback process. My belief in Sankara's cause and credibility also inspired friends and family to become donors and supporters.

As an EC member, I lead social media marketing strategies for all channels to spread awareness about the cause.

At Sankara, we interact with people right

from eight-year-old children to 80-year-old seniors. They can be students, professionals, or CEOs. We have to be respectful and get the organization's needs met while managing projects. I don't think any B-school in the world can teach what my volunteering experience taught me. The opportunity to help is precious because it gave me a purpose to work for.

For my volunteer work at Sankara, I was given the President's Volunteer Service Award signed by President George W. Bush in 2008.

My father believed in living a life of service and making each day count. I am just trying to walk in his footsteps.

**Raj Panchapakesan**  
EC Member

In Tamil, there is a saying: "Thanathil sirandadu Kan daanam". It means that the highest form of giving is donating your eyes. This quote has always resonated with me.

I first learned about SEF, USA from Namaste America programs two decades ago. Around 1999-2000, I met Kala Murali at the Chinmaya Mission, and I found the opportunity to volunteer with the best organization working for a

noble cause.

My father had cataract surgery on both eyes and suffered from complications. I could see how it affected his confidence. That moved me to become more actively involved with SEF, USA.

In 2004-05 when we launched iWalk to raise funds for Sankara, I introduced the idea of bringing in sponsorships. To this day, I help manage sponsorships for events.



I also coordinated for the Sankara Hospital in Ludhiana, Punjab. It was an incredible experience that taught me valuable lessons about project management, fundraising, as well as working with the government system.

My motivation to volunteer comes from the selfless leadership of Dr R.V. Ramani and Dr Radha Ramani in India, and Murali Krishnamurthy and Kala Murali in the US, as well as the loving team

of volunteers. I would love to contribute to the Vision 2030 strategy. I am grateful to be part of a selfless family/organization where God has given me a chance to give back to the community. In a way, SEF, USA has given me a purpose in life.

I want to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Ramani for initiating this movement, and to Murali and Sridhar for bringing it to the USA. I am deeply grateful to them for allowing us to be a part of this selfless movement and providing us with an eye-opening experience both figuratively and literally. We are now ready to move forward towards Vision 2030.

# Happy New Year 2024!

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# SEF, USA chapters across the country are writing its growth story

*All the chapters are run by volunteers. They host large-scale Navratri dandia, music concerts, and community events in collaboration with SEF, USA headquartered in San Jose, CA, to raise funds for Sankara's cause of eliminating curable blindness in rural India.*



Bay Area Volunteer Team at the Be the Vision Gala in December 2023

## San Francisco Bay Area

The Bay Area chapter was founded in 1998 in Milpitas, CA. It serves as the headquarters for SEF, USA from which the Board Members and veteran volunteers guide all other chapters. A modest team of

three started this journey, which has now flourished into a powerful movement of 200+ volunteers. The SF Bay Area chapter caters to all the functional needs of the organization including donor

care, marketing, fundraising, and accounting.

Fundraiser events have played a key role in the growth of SEF, USA. The biggest events are the Navratri Dandias which draw large crowds of over 6,000 people. Bollywood music

concerts featuring singers like Sonu Nigam and Shreya Ghoshal have been big draws in the past. They also host donor banquets, weekly booths, corporate giving, and individual fundraising campaigns.

These volunteer-led efforts

provide a continuous flow of funds, which are directed to eliminate curable blindness in India. Given the scale of operations and the aggressive goals set by the Vision 2030 program, they are constantly in need of more volunteers.



## Austin Chapter

The Austin chapter of SEF, USA was started in 2014 with a small but enthusiastic team of volunteers. They have now grown to about 95 volunteers, including a youth component.

Since its inception, this chapter has regularly organized community fundraising events such as Holi celebrations, banquets, walkathons, and mobile eye clinics. Thinking big, they have done Bol-

lywood music concerts with Shreya Ghoshal and Shankar Ehsaan Loy, and a classical music show featuring Tarun Bhattacharya.

Last year, the chapter participated in the Parade of India celebration in Austin. Their Dandia is a much-anticipated calendar event, which has grown from 500 participants in 2016 to attracting 3,000 in 2023.

## Houston

The Houston chapter was started almost a decade ago by dedicated volunteers experienced in non-profit management. Their signature event is the Annual Donor Appreciation Dinner every November which garners funds from generous donors and patrons for the Sankara cause of eradicating curable blindness in rural India. The chapter also provides volunteer team-building and leadership opportunities. It hopes to organize more events such as an annual Holi event, Bollywood shows, and other outreach efforts, all of which require more volunteers.





### Dallas

Active in the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex, this chapter began in 2000 and has seen exponential growth with over 150 youth and adult volunteers today. To raise funds, they have organized successful musical concerts, featuring singers such as Hariharan and Shankar Ehsaan Loy.

Since 2017, the Dallas team has been hosting the popular 5K Walkathon every year. From 2018, they added an annual Bollywood Dandia event. Both have consistently produced a high return on investment, created brand awareness, and energized the volunteers.

The Dallas chapter is proud to report that since 2017, they have contributed to more than 10,000 free eye surgeries in India.

### Detroit

The Detroit chapter organized its first successful fundraiser, a musical concert, in 2008. It was followed by Sangam - a trigulbandi of Hindustani, Carnatic music, and Odissi dance featuring leading artists from India. The chapter now rais-

es funds by partnering with major regional associations through "Giving back to Community" musical events.

In recent years, their activities have included setting up booths at India's Independence Day celebrations, as well as at religious and cultural events.

### Southern California

The Los Angeles chapter's dedicated team organizes various events throughout the year to garner funds and spread awareness about Sankara's mission. Some successful fundraisers hosted by them have included Bollywood musical concerts featuring singers like Sonu Nigam and Shreya Ghoshal, the Falguni Pathak Dandia and Holi events.

The Southern California chapters have many volunteers who are spread across Los Angeles, Orange, Ventura, and Riverside counties. They host events catering to these areas and welcome new, enthusiastic volunteers.



### New York Tri-state

The New York, New Jersey, and the Tri-State area chapters are driven by committed volunteers who actively engage in creating mission awareness and mobilizing funds for Sankara Eye Foundation, India. Young and old, the volunteers bring in a range of ideas and experiences to fulfill their mission. In the summers, they host information booths at fairs, expos and parades to bring awareness

about SEF, USA's role as the largest provider of free eye care in India. Their diverse fundraisers include cultural concerts, 5K walks, art shows, donor appreciation evenings, and fundraising galas.

The Tri-State teams also hold meetings with small groups of donors to update them about Sankara Eye Foundation's projects in India. Dandia events, hugely successful for some other chapters, are also envisaged.

### Seattle

The Seattle chapter is led by enthusiastic volunteers. The Microsoft Giving Campaign has been a leading source of grants by matching employee donations. Much of this is a result of the awareness campaigns led by the Seattle chapter. They have also organized cricket tournaments, Dandiya events, and poker tournaments for fundraising for Sankara.

### Phoenix

Started in 2003, this chapter focused initially on spreading awareness about Sankara's mission by setting up booths at Indian community events. In 2006, the volunteers' team organized a successful fundraising concert featuring renowned vocalist Dr Balamurali Krishna, in association with the Arizona Telugu Association, followed by another concert by Hariharan.

### Simi Valley

The Simi Valley chapter in California has a group of dedicated volunteers who come together to organize several fundraising events throughout the year to garner funds and spread awareness about Sankara Eye Foundation's mission. This chapter also has an active Youth wing. They organ-

ize annual events such as Walk for Vision, Dandia, the Youth Entrepreneur Workshop. The Penny for an Eye drive is youth volunteers' responsibility. Their volunteers are spread across Orange County, Los Angeles County, and Ventura County.

### Washington DC

A group of dedicated volunteers got together from Maryland and Virginia to start this chapter in the capital city.

They support Sankara Eye through various local activities. An internship program is being developed to help students volunteer for the Sankara cause and learn critical life skills.





# The Gift of Vision Outreach Program



Gift of Vision program is a flagship initiative of SEF, India. Started in 1990 to provide free eye care service to the rural community through a network of field workers, doctors and paramedics.

During the village camp, patients identified with vision problems are transported to the base hospital and provided 2-3 days' stay with complete treatment at no cost and then returned back to their villages. Follow-up visit by field doctors happens after a month to ensure the Gift of Vision is completely successful.



## It's a wrap! Bollywood bids adieu to 2023 by setting box office on fire

As we bid farewell to 2023, it becomes indisputable that this year has been a crescendo

in the symphony of curated entertainment. The curtain falls on an extraordinary chapter where the Indian audience not only embraced the familiar silver screen but also ventured into uncharted territories of live entertainment, exploring the vast and diverse world of cinema.

### Skyrocketing box-office collections

After a dull phase of nearly two years, Bollywood got back its mojo in 2023. Multiplexes witnessed increased footfalls as Hindi films such as 'Pathaan', 'Gadar 2', 'Jawan' and 'Animal', among others, have finally succeeded in attracting audiences to theatres. According to a report by Ormax Media, Hindi films raked in 41 per cent of the money in 2023 between January and November; the collections saw



(Courtesy: Reddit)

an increase of seven per cent over the same period last year. In a staggering display of cinematic prowess, the box office receipts for the first nine months of 2023 skyrocketed to a monumental Rs 8,798 crore, setting up a historic milestone.

## The comeback year

Last year marked some remarkable comebacks in the Bollywood industry. Several celebrities, who were on a hiatus, have made impressive returns, which included Bollywood badshah Shah Rukh Khan. Akshay Kumar made a comeback with two successful films -- 'OMG 2' and 'Mission Raniganj'.

The most impressive comeback of the year was by Deol brothers -- Sunny and Bobby. While the elder Deol set the B-Town cash register ringing, the younger one had a 10-minute role in Sandeep Reddy Vanga's 'Animal' and became the talk of the town.



'Gadar 2' brought back India's most loved family of Tara Singh, played by Sunny Deol. (Photo courtesy: Instagram)

## SRK alone contributed over 50 pc to Bollywood's total earnings

Bollywood's King Khan made a triumphant return to the silver screen after nearly five years. His latest release 'Dunki' crossed the Rs 200-crore milestone in India and has already earned a total of Rs 400-crore worldwide. The actor's box-office supremacy yielded a mind-boggling total of Rs 2,600-crore in a single year.

'Pathaan', the superstar's first release of 2023, grossed Rs 1,050.30-crore while 'Jawan' grossed Rs 1,148.32-crore and 'Dunki' has now crossed Rs 400-crore.

This is more than 50 per cent of Bollywood's total earnings in 2023, which amounted to Rs 4,400-crore.

### Major hits and misses

The year 2023 proved lucky for Bollywood but amidst high expectations, there were also some big titles that failed to capitalise on the great theatrical boom of Hindi movies post pandemic, ultimately falling flat at the box office.

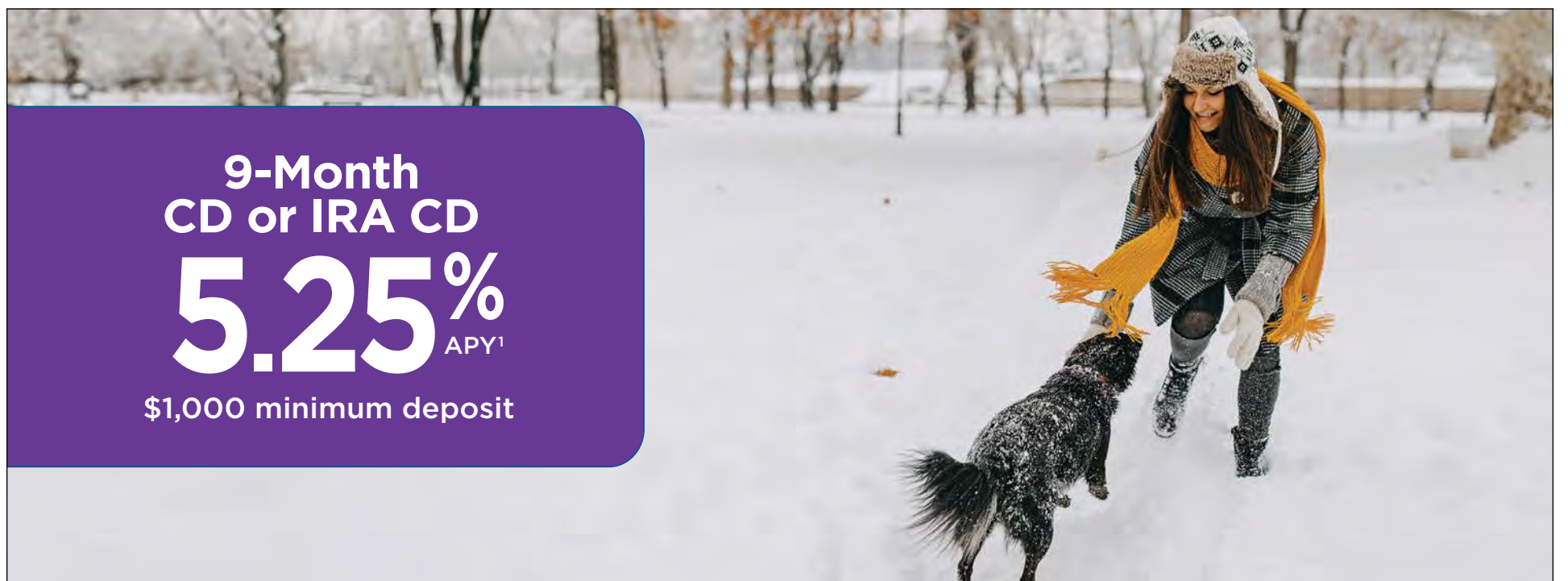
'Animal' did not just become one of the biggest blockbusters of the year but also marked Ranbir Kapoor's comeback as a performer. The film earned a total collection of Rs 540.86 crore at the box office (still counting). High-octane entertainers 'Pathaan' and 'Jawaan' were instant hits, followed by 'Gadar 2', a sequel to 2000 hit 'Gadar: Ek Prem Katha'. In 'Tiger 3', Salman Khan returned as super spy Avinash Singh Rathore aka Tiger in the third part of his eponymous movie franchise. 'Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani': Karan Johar's seventh



'Kisi Ka Bhai Kisi Ki Jaan' didn't click with the audience, while 'Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani' won hearts. (Photo: Instagram)

full-fledged feature not only became one of the highest grossing films of the filmmaker's career, but is also his most talked-about and progressive movie till date.

As for the flops, Kangana Ranaut had another forgettable year as 'Tejas', which featured her as an Indian Air Force pilot, turned out to be a colossal disappointment. This was followed by 'The Vaccine War', 'Bhola', 'Kisi Ka Bhai Kisi Ki Jaan' and 'Aadipurush', which was the most controversial film of 2023.



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# India in 2024: A rising giant poised for growth



By **Rajesh Mehta & Sunny Sabharwal**

2023 has been a remarkable year for India. Despite global economic uncertainties, the country has emerged as a beacon of growth, showcasing resilience and potential. As we look towards 2024, the future appears bright, with a multitude of promising sectors and opportunities waiting to be seized.

## Growth story of 2023

India's economy grew at an impressive 7.2% in 2023, solidifying its position as the fastest-growing major economy in the world. This robust growth was driven by several factors. Firstly, consumer spending remained strong, fuelled by rising incomes and government initiatives like the 'Make in India' and 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' programs.

Secondly, Foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows reached a record high, exceeding \$83 billion in 2023. This substantial investment fuelled AI/tech space, infrastructure development, renewables and manufacturing industries. Next, with a young and increasingly skilled workforce, India enjoys a demographic dividend that is expected to continue driving economic growth in the coming years.

Lastly, the government implemented various reforms to improve the business climate and attract investments. These reforms included streamlining regulations, reducing red tape, and focusing on digitalization.

As India embarks on its journey towards a \$5 trillion economy by 2025, several sectors are poised to play a pivotal role in its growth trajectory. Let's look at the Indian healthcare sector which is currently valued at \$372 billion and is projected to reach \$658 billion by 2025, growing at a CAGR of 16.2%.

This growth is driven by rising disposable incomes, increasing awareness about health insurance, and government initiatives like Ayushman Bharat. With rising healthcare demands and a growing middle class, the demand for advanced medical services, diagnostic facilities, and specialized healthcare professionals is expected to surge.

Additionally, the integration of technology through telemedicine, electronic medical records, and AI-powered diagnostics is expected to further enhance healthcare delivery and accessibility. This sector holds immense potential for both domestic and foreign investment, particularly in areas like medical tourism, digital health platforms, and innovative medical technology.

AI is another sector which is expected to be adopted across various sectors, including healthcare, finance, agriculture, and manufacturing and hence boost growth for the Indian economy. The sector is expected to reach \$7.8 billion by 2025, with a CAGR of 20.2 percent between 2020 and 2025,

As India embarks on its journey towards a \$5 trillion economy by 2025, several sectors are poised to play a pivotal role in its growth trajectory. Let's look at the Indian healthcare sector which is currently valued at \$372 billion and is projected to reach \$658 billion by 2025, growing at a CAGR of 16.2%. (Image: Adda247)

according to data company IDC.

The Indian government is actively promoting AI development through initiatives like the National AI Mission and the establishment of AI Centers of Excellence which will fuel further innovation and collaboration in the space. As of May 2023, the Generative AI sector in India featured over 60 startups focused on delivering solutions and services to clients in diverse industry sectors. The demand for skilled AI professionals will continue to grow, leading to an increase in training programs and educational initiatives.

In April, the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) gave its approval to the Indian Space Policy, 2023, emphasizing the involvement of the private sector. The industry has garnered \$112 million in funding in 2022, reflecting a 22% increase year on year and \$62 million in funding during the initial half of 2023, a remarkable 60% surge compared to previous year. There will be a growing emphasis on developing smaller satellites and launch vehicles, which are more cost-effective and agile. We can expect to see increased utilization of space-based technologies for various applications like Earth observation, navigation, and communication which will have a significant impact on sectors like agriculture, disaster management, and urban planning. Further, India is actively collaborating with other spacefaring nations on various projects and will contribute to knowledge sharing, technology transfer, and joint space exploration endeavors.

Eyes worldwide are also watching the Indian fintech market which is one of the fastest-growing globally, valued at USD 70 billion in 2023 and projected to reach \$150 billion by 2025. This growth is fuelled by government initiatives like Digital India, the rise of mobile internet penetration, and

a young tech-savvy population. With the increasing adoption of mobile wallets, digital payments, and online financial services, the fintech landscape in India is expected to witness continued expansion. New-age technologies like blockchain, artificial intelligence, and big data are expected to further revolutionize the sector, creating opportunities in areas like lending, wealth management, and insurance. Moreover, the government's focus on financial inclusion and the rise of neobanks are poised to bring a large unbanked population into the formal financial system, further fuelling growth.

India has set ambitious targets for renewable energy, aiming to achieve 500 GW of non-fossil fuel-based power capacity by 2030. The government's supportive policies, falling costs of renewable energy technologies, and growing environmental concerns are driving investments in this sector. With a vast potential for solar and wind energy, India is poised to become a global leader in renewable energy.

Globally, nations are focussing on replacing fossil fuel driven vehicles. Among the various alternatives being developed by nations, the electric vehicle (EV) market is most promising. This growth will create opportunities in EV manufacturing, charging infrastructure development, battery technology, and related services. Additionally, the traditional automobile sector is expected to witness significant changes with the transition towards electric and hybrid vehicles, presenting opportunities for innovation and adaptation.

## Challenges abound

Despite its promising trajectory, India faces several challenges in its path towards becoming a global economic powerhouse. India's current account deficit (CAD) is expected to widen in 2024 due to rising

import costs and a slow-down in export growth.

A wider CAD could put pressure on the Indian rupee and lead to capital outflows. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is likely to continue raising interest rates in 2024 to control inflation which would dampen corporate investment and economic growth. While the road network in India has grown by leaps and bounds, India needs to work on unemployment and social infrastructure.

India must create more jobs to absorb its burgeoning workforce as well as address the mismatch between existing skills and industry requirements. India is facing a severe water

crisis, with many parts of the country experiencing drought conditions which poses a challenge to agriculture, industry, and public health.

Lastly, India should work on creating an investor-friendly environment. Abrupt changes in tax codes, such as GST on gaming sector, dictatorial manner of functioning of government enforcement agencies as well as regional economic disparities are among the key issues highlighted by the investor community time and again.

## Conclusion

With a robust foundation laid in 2023 and promising sectors driving its growth, India's future looks bright. While challenges remain, the country's potential for sustained economic development is undeniable. By effectively addressing existing challenges and seizing the opportunities presented by its promising sectors, India is poised to become a global economic powerhouse in the years to come.



**Rajesh Mehta** is a leading International Consultant in the field of Market Entry, Innovation and Public Policy. **Sunny Sabharwal** is a Chartered Accountant, ex-banker and a financial writer.



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# Sky Gazing: Forecasting the weather



The weather forecasting services market is expected to reach \$4.5 billion in 2032 (Image: NGS)

By **Sadhna Shanker**

The past year has seen all of us getting somewhat accustomed to seeing extreme weather conditions in the images on our phones. Various parts of the world were affected in different ways. Extreme heat waves struck parts of the globe that had not experienced such harsh temperatures earlier. Flash floods struck Dubai in November 2023, leading to flooding of roads and water-logging in the desert city.

In September 2023, New York City had declared an emergency due to heavy downpour that had led to shutting down of subway lines, turned major roads into lakes and sent children to the upper floors of flooding schools. Will the coming winter also bring extreme weather?

This can only be answered by

the weather forecasters.

Forecasting the weather has a long history. It is said that even in 650 BC, the Babylonians tried to understand the weather based on cloud patterns and astrology. In 350 BC, Aristotle was describing weather patterns in text; however he did not believe that wind is air in motion. He did however try to explain that west winds are cold because they blow from the sunset!

The scientific study of meteorology did not take off until measuring instruments became available. It began with the invention of the electric telegraph in 1835, which allowed exchange of information quickly. Soon after, a Royal Navy officer, Francis Beaufort developed the wind force scale, which later became the Beaufort scale. He set up 15 stations on land that used the telegraph to create a gale warning service. It was in

1861, that the Times first began to publish daily weather forecasts.

After the Second World War, Maniac, a computer designed at Princeton University could do 10000 calculations a second, and it was used among others to model and forecast the planet's weather. Since then weather forecasting has come a long way. According to the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) a five day forecast today is about as accurate as a two day forecast a quarter of a century ago. Increasingly AI and machine learning have entered the field, making predictions more accurate.

Weather forecasting hitherto has been primarily in the public sector. However, with the importance of knowing what the weather will be for a variety of uses from aviation, agriculture, to military strategy, sports events and logistics of supply chains, many private players have also entered the arena. Most of them are based in the richer countries, but there are now nearly 15 startups in India in this space. The market for accurate weather forecasts is expanding as end-use industries like transportation, logistics, and renewable energy require certainty in weather

er conditions to boost productivity and cut costs. As per reports, the weather forecasting services market is expected to reach \$4.5 billion in 2032, with a 6.7% CAGR during the forecasted period of 2022-2032.

As we move into 2024, let us hope that the weather becomes a more predictable companion of humanity, through improved tackling of the climate crisis and enhanced tools to understand the impact of extreme weather. And you and I, when we peer into our phones, see better times ahead!



**Sadhna Shanker** is a New Delhi based author of six books. She also contributes to national and international publications.

The views expressed are not necessarily those of The South Asian Times



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# Fight against terrorism: Dawn of a new era in India

By Vipul Tamhane

For the past few days the extra judicial executions and targets getting neutralized in Pakistan and Canada are attributed towards India borrowing a page or two from Mossad's post Munich Olympics operations viz. Operation Wrath of God or Black-Ops.

However, these killings are not yet confirmed by the government and until then we will rely on the conventional yet effective means of tackling insurgencies and terrorism that India has deployed under the Modi administration.

India faces a complex internal security landscape marked by diverse challenges threatening national unity and stability. Terrorism and insurgencies in India are regionally concentrated, each with unique complexities. In Jammu and Kashmir, historical, political, and religious factors fuel a protracted conflict, exacerbated by cross-border influences.

Northeast India especially Assam, Tripura, Manipur, Nagaland and Mizoram, faces diverse issues, including ethnic tensions and demands for autonomy, groups like United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) have historically sought independent states, challenging the nation's territorial integrity.

The Maoist Naxalite insurgency in central and eastern India poses a persistent threat, with communist revolutionaries challenging state authority and exploiting rural grievances resulting into separatist movements emerging in various regions in central states i.e. Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and parts of Maharashtra, here the Left-Wing Extremism stems from socio-economic disparities, tribal displacement, and Maoist ideology.

An old movement in new form i.e. the Khalistani separatist movement seeking to create a sovereign Sikh state within Punjab has driven past terrorism in Punjab, while Northwestern states of Rajasthan and Gujarat contend with religious extremism and geopolitical tensions. India has been addressing these internal threats necessitates a comprehensive and nuanced approach, combining robust security measures with efforts to tackle socio-economic disparities and foster inclusive development. The evolving nature of these challenges



The Indian government has addressed overall terrorism and insurgencies through comprehensive measures. Political and legal measures include peace accords, governance improvements, and granting special provisions to address unique cultural contexts. (Image: Mint)

underscores the imperative for adaptive and holistic strategies to safeguard the nation's internal security.

India faces external terrorism threats primarily from four regions, Pakistan's State-sponsored terror groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) operate from Pakistan. From Afghanistan, concerns arise from the rise of the Taliban and potential presence of militant groups like Al-Qaeda, posing risks of cross-border infiltration and attacks through porous borders. While less prominent, certain Islamic groups in Bangladesh have historically posed sporadic threats.

## India's new approach since 2014

Since 2014, the Indian government has undertaken a comprehensive and proactive approach to combat terrorism on various fronts. In the regional arena, active participation in initiatives like SAARC and BIMSTEC has fostered cooperation and intelligence sharing with neighboring countries.

In response to the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan, India focused on humanitarian aid and engaged with regional stakeholders to counter potential terrorist threats. Geopolitically, strengthened ties with the United States led to enhanced counter-terrorism cooperation, while active participation in global forums like Financial Action Task Force (FATF) showcased India's commitment to international collaboration.

The resilience of security forces, intelligence agencies, and civilian strengthening was crucial in

this fight. India has signed MoUs on counterterrorism with numerous countries, including the US, UK, France, Russia, and China. These MoUs facilitate intelligence sharing, joint investigations, training programs, and capacity building initiatives. India actively participates in United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions and committees related to counterterrorism, such as the UN Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC). India is party to several Extradition treaties to enable the handover of individuals accused of terrorism or other serious crimes between respective countries.

In the military domain, significant investments in modernization, advanced weaponry, drones, and surveillance technology have enhanced India's capability to detect and neutralize terrorist threats. The expansion and empowerment of special forces units and intelligence reforms have further improved the ability to track terrorist networks and prevent attacks. These multifaceted efforts signify a determined and comprehensive strategy to address the complex challenges of terrorism effectively.

India established a The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) Technical Cooperation Centre for assistance and joint counter-terrorism exercises with the other BIMSTEC treaty nations viz., Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand. India is party to several SAARC initiatives focused on regional cooperation against terrorism, including the SAARC Regional Con-

vention on Suppression of Terrorism and Financing of Terrorism. With Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), India commits to counterterrorism cooperation, intelligence sharing, and joint exercises in the Asian region.

In 2016, militants attacked an Indian army base in Uri, Kashmir, India, aimed at neutralizing terrorist elements responsible for these Uri attacks the Indian Army conducted surgical strikes in the Pakistani region across the Line of Control (LOC) to set an unprecedented instance of punitive will as a retaliatory measure with a precision and targeted approach, signaling India's commitment to safeguarding its national security. In February 2019, the Indian Air Force launched airstrikes in Pakistan-administered Kashmir, targeting terrorist training camps operated by Jaish-e-Mohammed.

These operations were in answer to the significant loss of life in the Pulwama suicide bombing of 14th February 2019, by the Pakistan-based militant group Jaish-e-Mohammed that heightened tensions between India and Pakistan, leading to a international concern, particularly regarding the Kashmir conflict.

On the legal and constitutional front by strengthening the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) and also taking steps at the enforcement level by giving the National Investigation Agency (NIA) a truly federal structure through amendments to the relevant law, collectively weakening the ecosystem of terrorism.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi abrogated Article 370 on August

5, 2019. The abrogation asserted the removal of special un-uniform constitutional status of governance in the region and facilitated enhanced security measures in the region. The absence of Article 370 allowed for more effective security operations, better intelligence gathering, and improved border management, curbing infiltration, and cross-border terrorism. The removal also reduced political interference, creating a less conducive environment for separatist movements. Economic development initiatives were initiated, aiming to address root causes of discontent, while improved governance and public services were seen as byproducts, fostering greater public satisfaction, and reducing alienation.

Over the span from June 2014 to August 2023, Jammu and Kashmir witnessed a remarkable decline in terrorism. Incidents dropped by overall 70%, with total deaths from 7217 incidents, encompassing civilians and security forces, decreasing by 69%. Civilian casualties notably plummeted by 81% from 2829 in June 2014 to 891 in August 2023, showcasing a substantial enhancement in civilian safety.

Since 2014, the northeastern area has had a period of peace, with insurgent violence falling by 80% and civilian deaths falling by 89%. This was accomplished as a result of the surrender of 6,000 insurgents. In situations of terror funding, investigation agencies have a 94% conviction record.

India's journey is a nuanced and hopeful one through the efforts of addressing root causes of conflict, strengthening security measures, and fostering international cooperation are essential steps towards a brighter future. India has shown its will and prowess of leaving no stones unturned in quest of combating terrorism.



Vipul Tamhane is a counter terrorism expert and a visiting faculty with Pune University (SPPU) at Dept. of Defense and Strategic Studies (DDSS). He is also founder and Editor-in-Chief at Diplomacy Direct, a public interest Think Tank based in India.

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## Mani Bhaumik funds \$1 M award in honor of JC Bose



Physicist-philanthropist Mani Bhaumik (Image courtesy: ucla.edu)



Jagadish Chandra Bose (Image courtesy: ecologise.in)

**New York:** India-born American physicist-philanthropist, Mani Bhaumik has agreed to donate \$ 1 million to honor the work of J C Bose, the Indian scientist whose work on wireless telegraphy was ignored for long by the West. A medal and an honorarium would be awarded to promising young scientists starting in 2025, according to a report in The Times of India.

Recognition and appreciation comes late to scientist and inventor Jagadish Chandra Bose, who invented the detector for wireless telegraphy. Italian inventor and engineer G Marconi used this for his historic demonstration of the first-ever trans-Atlantic radio-telegraphy and was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics. Since he did not mention Bose – without whose invention Marconi could not have won recognition and accolades – Bose’s vital contribution remained hidden. The failure to give cred-

it to Bose has long irked scientists in India familiar with Bose’s work.

Efforts to publicly acknowledge the valuable contributions of Bose began when The Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE), located in New York City, placed a memorial plaque in Kolkata, at the Presidency College, now a university, where Bose came up with his ground-breaking invention. And now, with their intense lobbying and with special effort put in by Prof S V Sankaran of the Indian Institute of Science and Technology, Bengaluru, the IEEE has decided to establish a prestigious medal and award named

the Jagadish Chandra Bose Medal. However, to sponsor the medal and award in perpetuity, IEEE needed to come up with one million US dollars. Mani Bhaumik has offered to donate the entire amount.

Bengal-born Mani Bhaumik, who lives in Los Angeles, holds numerous patents and is the inventor of the laser technology that paved the way for Lasik eye surgery. Bhaumik says he feels his domination is a way of paying back for all that he gained from his teacher and mentor, Satyendra Nath Bose of the Bose-Einstein statistics fame who was a student of J C Bose. (Source: TOI)

## Dr Rajiv Shah named to NY Fed Board of Directors

**New York:** Dr Rajiv Shah, the Indian-American president of the Rockefeller Foundation, has been named to the Board of Directors of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York.

The Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System appointed Shah as a Class C director for a three-year term ending December 31, 2026.

Class C directors on the New York Fed’s Board of Directors represent the interests of the public, the Federal Reserve Bank of New York said in a statement released on Friday.

Shah has led The Rockefeller Foundation, a philanthropy whose mission is to promote the well-being of people around the world, since 2017.

Before joining the foundation, he was founder and managing partner of Latitude Capital, a private equity firm focused on infrastructure and energy projects in Africa and Asia.

From 2009 to 2015, he served as head of the US Agency for International Development (USAID).

Before joining USAID, Shah served as chief scientist and undersecretary for research, edu-



Dr Rajiv Shah is president of the Rockefeller Foundation (Image courtesy: devex.com)

cation, and economics at the US Department of Agriculture, where he created the National Institute for Food and Agriculture.

Earlier in his career, he was a director at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, where he created the International Financing Facility for Immunization.

Shah is a graduate of the University of Michigan, the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, and the Wharton School of Business.

## Indian Consulate in NY conferred prestigious ODOP Award 2023

**New York:** ‘One District One Product’ is among the several initiatives of the Government of India in line with Prime Minister Modi’s vision of “Aatma Nirbhar Bharat”, a self-reliant India. The idea is to select, brand, and promote One Product from each District of the country, harnessing traditional strengths and technology for holistic development.

The prestigious ODOP Awards were conferred upon Indian Districts, States, and Indian Missions abroad by EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar and Commerce and Industry Minister Mr. Piyush Goyal on January 3 as part of the ‘Aatma Nirbhar Bharat Utsav’. The Awards aim to recognize and honor those who have demonstrated exceptional accomplishments in furthering economic development through the ODOP approach.

The Consulate General of India in New York was among the three Indian Missions to receive the prestigious ODOP Award 2023. It was declared the run-

ner-up in the category of India’s Foreign Missions for its contribution in promoting ODOP items in the world.

India’s Consulate General in New York, with active guidance and support of MEA and the Department of Commerce, has undertaken a major campaign to showcase and promote One District One Product items of India in the United States. Some of the popular products include Araku Coffee, Assam, and Darjeeling Tea, ittar (perfume) from Kannauj, Lakadong turmeric, jute and textiles products, millet-based food items, Dhokra metal handicrafts and Longpi pottery, among others.

In 2022, Consulate organized an ODOP float at the iconic ‘India Day Parade’ in Manhattan and also put up ODOP stall at Times Square on the occasion of International Yoga Day which created widespread awareness in New York and around about ODOP items. Besides these, numerous trade shows, product launches and other events have been hosted and organized by the Consulate to promote and popularize these distinctive expressions of India’s diversity, heritage, culture and economic potential.

The ODOP initiative stands as a testament to the Government of India’s commitment to promoting the country’s unique products globally, paving the way for a self-reliant India on the global stage.

The ODOP initiative stands as a testament to the Government of India’s commitment to promoting the country’s unique products globally, paving the way for a self-reliant India on the global stage

## Spiritual Tourism Theerta Yatra Planners Sarvamangala Shri Saneeswara Temple – NY



Spiritual Tourism is a Spiritual wellness activity, a form of cultural tourism that focuses on satisfying our needs through cultural and spiritual enrichment. It aims to utilize cultural resources and beliefs about attaining a higher level of divinity. It provides a sense of fulfillment and connection to our traditions, ancestors and ideal for those seeking personal growth and self-discovery, it enhances calmness, relaxation, and improved health conditions while we admire the beauty and significance of the environment.

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Khumbh Mela 2025

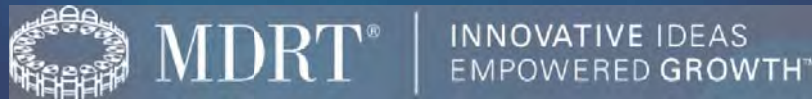
Prayagraj Maha Kumbh Mela to be held in 2025 at Prayagraj. Kumbh is the largest religious congregation celebrated by millions of Hindu pilgrims from all across the world. The main event of the Kumbh Mela is “Shahi Snan” Holy dip in the Ganga along with millions of other Hindu Pilgrims. The Maha Kumbh will begin on 14th January 2025 with Makar Sankranti and end on 26 February 2025 with Maha Shivratri. Shahi Snan (Holy Dips) dates will fall on the special occasion of Makar Sankranti, Mauni Amavasya, Basant Panchmi and Maha Shivratri. The Maha Kumbh mela will end with the event of Maha Shivratri festival. Please find below the four Royal bathing dates (tentative) in Kumbh Mela 2025.

- 14th January 2025- Makar sankranti (Festival starting date)
- 29th January 2025- Maagh Amavasya
- 2 February 2025- Basant Panchmi
- 26 February 2025- Maha shivratri (Festival ending dates)

Kumbh Mela is associated with spiritual awakening and enlightenment of the devotees. It enlighten the devotees with regard to their sins, virtues, blessings and beliefs. The river Ganga in itself mirrors the movement of life, flowing since last many centuries, with the confluence of historical and traditional values. People believe that the holy dip is highly enriching. The complete journey of Kumbh Mela 2025 is said to instill new hopes and new beginnings.

### For more Information & Registration:

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## Neil Zaveri Achieves Top of the Table MDRT & Forum 400

Westbury, NY — Neil Zaveri of local Zaveri Insurance in Westbury, NY has qualified for Top of the Table, a coveted milestone achievement for their membership in the [MDRT](#). Neil Zaveri's membership equips them with tools and resources to better serve their local community.

Top of the Table is an internationally recognized mark of excellence reserved for the most successful in the financial services industry. This places Zaveri among the top professionals in the intensely competitive global life insurance and financial services industries.

Forum 400 is an exclusive community that brings together elite insurance producers to openly share practical strategies and fresh ideas to positively impact client outcomes and remain at the top of the field. The foundation of Forum 400 is built on the pillars of collaborative culture, exclusive community, and practical solutions.

The Zaveri family has been in the insurance business for three generations. Started by Ashok / Kala Zaveri in 1969 and then followed by Salil Zaveri in 1978. Neil joined in 2010.

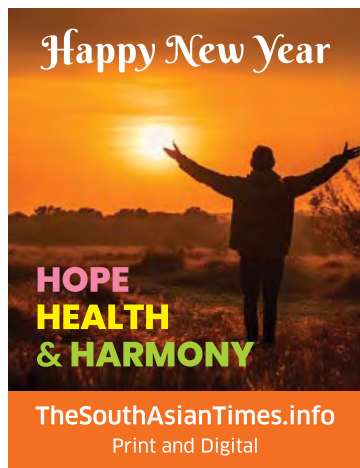
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# 2023 INDIAN AMERICAN NEWSMAKERS!

## Kamala Harris becomes first woman to give West Point commencement speech



(Image courtesy: Theguardian.com)

In May 2023 Vice-President Kamala Harris became the first woman in West Point's 221-year history to deliver a commencement speech.

Addressing over 900 graduating cadets at the elite American military academy in West Point, New York, Harris told them that they are graduating "into an increasingly unsettled world where long-standing principles are at risk" and cited the threats of Russian and Chinese aggression in her speech. "Cadets, global security and global prosperity

depend on the leadership of the United States of America. And a strong America remains indispensable to the world," said Harris. "Our democratic ideals of freedom and liberty inspire billions ... And our military is the strongest in the world. Our military is a force that underwrites global stability and our national security. "And it is this pillar of our strength where you, cadets, have dedicated yourself to lead," she added.

## Pioneering scientist Dr. Paulraj awarded 100<sup>th</sup> Faraday Medal

The Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET), UK, awarded the 2023 Faraday Medal to Stanford University Professor Emeritus and Celesta Capital Advisor Arogyaswami Paulraj. Awarded at a ceremony in London in October 2023, Dr. Paulraj became the 100<sup>th</sup> recipient of the medal, with his citation reading, "For the invention, advancement, and commercialization of MIMO

Wireless'. The Faraday Medal is one of the world's most prestigious awards for engineers and scientists who advance technologies with global impact.

First awarded in 1922 to Oliver Heaviside, the Faraday Medal is the longest-standing global recognition in science and technology. Named after Michael Faraday, the father of electromagnetism, early medalists included J.J. Thompson



(Image courtesy: Provided)

(discovery of the electron) and E. Rutherford (discovery of the atomic nucleus).

efforts to promote cereal. The song features Indian American Grammy-winning singer Falu (Falguni Shah) and her husband and singer Gaurav Shah.

'Abundance of Millets' was nominated alongside Arooj Aftab, Vijay Iyer and Shahzad Ismaili's 'Shadow Forces', Burna Boy's 'Alone', Davido's 'Feel', Silvana Estrada's track 'Milagro Y Disastre', Béla Fleck, Edgar Meyer and Zakir Hussain featuring Rakesh Chaurasia for 'Pashto', Ibrahim Maalouf featuring Cimafunk and Tank and the Bangas's 'Todo Colores'.

## Grammy nomination for Falu's song on millets featuring PM Modi



(Image courtesy: Falu/Facebook)

The song about millets featuring Prime Minister Narendra Modi was nominated in the Best Global Music Performance category for Grammy Awards 2024. The track titled 'Abundance of Millets' talks about the health benefits and the government's

## Dev Shah wins Scripps National Spelling Bee

Dev Shah, a 14-year-old from Largo, Florida, won the Scripps National Spelling Bee in June 2023. Dev won more than \$50,000 in cash and prizes and is the 22nd champion in the past 24 years with South Asian heritage.

His winning word was "psammophile."



(Image courtesy: latestinbollywood.com)

## Shiv Bhakta wins MIT's \$100K Entrepreneurship Competition

An Indian American graduate student at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) won an entrepreneurship competition and received \$100,000 for pitching an idea that would commercialize an ultra-thin film solar technology. Shiv Bhakta and his teammate Richard Swartout won the cash prize on May 15. The pair founded Active Surfaces, a company that manufactures ultra-thin, lightweight and durable solar panels for global decarbonization. Earlier, he won MIT's Student Sustainability Leader Award. In 2022, his company won first place at the Harvard Climate Symposium Startup Pitch competition.

## World Bank president Ajay Banga in 2023 list of 'Great Immigrants'



(Image courtesy: The Pioneer)

In June, Ajay Banga, the president of the World Bank, was named by a prestigious philanthropic organization to its annual 'Great Immigrants' list of honorees who have enriched and strength-

ened America and its democracy through their contributions and actions.

Banga, who became World Bank chief in June 2023, is the first-ever Indian-American to lead the institution. He was the only honoree from India in the year's list of 'Great Immigrants' by the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

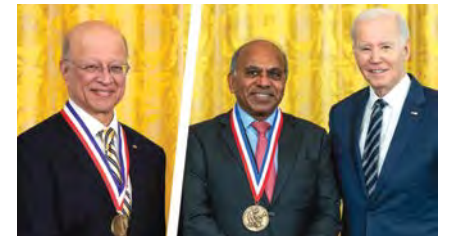
With over 30 years of experience in key positions, Banga is expected to usher in transformative policies at the World Bank to combat poverty and address climate change, opening opportunities for people around the globe.

## Two Indian American scientists honored with US' highest scientific award

Two Indian American scientists were awarded the National Medal of Technology and Innovation by US President Joe Biden at the White House in October 2023.

The two Indian-Americans — Ashok Gadgil and Subra Suresh — were awarded the National Medal of Technology and Innovation and the National Medal of Science, respectively.

The National Medal of Science is



(Image courtesy: Indianexpress.com)

the nation's highest scientific honor, established by the US Congress in 1959 and administered by the US National Science Foundation.

## Tanishq Mathew Abraham becomes one of the world's youngest Ph.D. holders

Tanishq Mathew Abraham, a 19-year-old studying biomedical engineering at UC Davis became one of the world's youngest Ph.D. holders in June 2023.

Abraham was born and raised in Sacramento in an Indian American immigrant family. He enrolled in college when he was 7 years old and graduated high school by the time he was 10. Just four years later, he graduated from UC Davis with a bachelor's degree in biomedical engineering and con-



(Image courtesy: Twitter/UCDavisCOE)

tinued his field of study into a Ph.D. program, focusing on the development of artificial intelligence systems for diagnostic pathology.

## Arjun Nimmala becomes first Indian American teen to be drafted by MLB



(Image courtesy: sportsnet.ca)

The Toronto Blue Jays selected 17-year-old shortstop Arjun Nimmala with the 20th overall pick in the first round of Sunday's MLB Draft.

Nimmala became the highest-selected first-generation Indian American and is looking to become the first player of Indian descent to play Major League Baseball.



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# Trailblazer: NJ Township gets first Indian-American Sikh Mayor

Singh, who has lived in Montgomery for 24 years, was unanimously selected to serve as Mayor by her fellow Township Committee members.

"It's an enormous privilege to be sworn in by trailblazer Congresswoman Bonnie Watson Coleman as the first elected Sikh woman Mayor in New Jersey and the first Indian-American woman Mayor," said Mayor Neena Singh.

"What energizes and motivates me is the spirit of service. I strongly believe we all have a responsibility to give back, and I am blessed to do so in a town that reflects America's diversity," said Singh, whose priorities for



Neena Singh was administered the oath of office by Congresswoman Bonnie Watson Coleman at the Montgomery Township Reorganization Meeting on January 4. (Image courtesy: odishatv.in/IANS)

2024 are public safety and health.

Having previously served as Deputy Mayor and Township Committeewoman, Singh was nominated to the position by outgoing Mayor Devra Keenan and committee-woman Patricia Taylor Todd.

In her new role, Singh will preside at meetings of the Township Committee and will have the power to appoint subcommittees with the Committee's consent. In addition, she will also have the power to make proclamations concerning holidays and events of interest in the township and to exercise the ceremonial power of the township.

# Pran Pratishtha of Ram Mandir gives Hindus a reason to celebrate: NYC Mayor Eric Adams

New York: Hindus not just in India but also from South Asian and Indo-Caribbean communities living in New York City "have a reason to celebrate and lift their spiritual-



Mayor Adams was speaking at 'Mata Ki Chowki' celebration at Geeta Mandir. (Image courtesy: Indiatoday.in)

ity," Mayor Eric Adams asserted on Saturday. Mayor Adams attended a Mata Ki Chowki, a religious celebration, at the Geeta Mandir in the city. Adams — joined by one of his top allies Deputy Commissioner of International Affairs Dilip Chauhan- thanked and highlighted the "importance of true faith and the importance of worship."

When asked about the opening of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya and what it meant to the Hindus of New York City, Adams said that the opening is 'extremely important'.

"We have one of the largest Indian populations here in the city and (Ram Mandir opening) allows them to celebrate and lift their spirituality to help us all in the healing process," Mayor Adams told the

Hindu community members.

In his remarks to the community, Adams was not shy about accepting the support from the Hindu community and said that his triumph was a result of his faith, the faith of the Hindus, and the blessing of temple priest Swami Satyanand of Geeta Temple in New York. "I know that prayer works, I know that we show and display our faith we can overcome all obstacles and the challenges and difficulties that come with becoming a mayor. It was due to my faith. It was due to your breath. It was due to your belief that I'm here today."

"When we were running to become mayor, you blessed me and told me that I would be the mayor of New York City and as we see today, seven years later," Adams told Swami Satyanand.

## Ram Mandir consecration ceremony to be telecast live at Times Square

"The live broadcast of the consecration ceremony of Shri Ram Mandir in Ayodhya on January 22 will not only be telecast across India at booth level but also be live-stream at the iconic Times Square in New York City in the United States, India Today reported citing sources.

The report said the much-awaited 'Pran-Pratishtha' ceremony of Ram Lalla will also be live-streamed at various Indian embassies, and consulates overseas. Earlier in August 2020, a digital billboard of the Ram Mandir was played at Times Square marking 'Bhoomi Pujan' of Shri Ram Mandir in Ayodhya on August 5.

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- |      |   |      |                           |
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| 1/26 | Isata Kanneh-Mason + Royal Philharmonic Orchestra | 2/23 | Audra McDonald            |
| 1/27 | CMS: David Finckel + Wu Han                       | 2/25 | San Jose Taiko            |
| 2/4  | Jimmy Webb  | 3/3  | New York Arabic Orchestra |
| 2/21 | Erth's Dinosaur Zoo Live                          | 5/10 | Dance Theatre of Harlem   |

Tilles Center is more than a stage; it's a cultural sanctuary where the world's finest artists and our community converge, creating an enduring legacy for generations to come

beside Josh Bell and the Academy of St Martin in the Fields, and Midori and Festival Strings Lucerne, are the New York Arabic Orchestra, and the Brooklyn Raga Massive. Highlighting these global perspectives together intentionally reflects more of our community than ever before."

The past year exemplifies this mission, with sold-out triumphs like luminaries Trevor Noah, Brandi Carlile, Lin-Manuel Miranda, Samara Joy, and John Legend, performances by global sensations Midori, Bassem Youssef, MOMIX, Ali Stroker, Parsons Dance, and partnerships with Jazz at Lincoln Center and Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center.

This spring's events continue the story. From the grandeur of The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra to the rhythmic pulse of San Jose Taiko, the acrobatic prowess of the Peking Acrobats to the elegance of Dance Theatre of Harlem, Broadway's finest Audra McDonald, Jesus Christ Superstar, and Jaime Lozano, to Long Island's own Jimmy Webb - each performance is intentionally curated to resonate with the community's varied backgrounds and voices.

Tilles Center's educational mission includes programs like student matinees, neuro-diverse community initiatives, LIU student employment, master classes, and student ticket access. Dunn notes, "We want students from LIU and beyond to actively engage with the arts in various capacities. Our educational programs reach thousands of learners of all ages."

Reflecting the goal of welcoming everyone on Long Island to experience world-class artists, make memories and celebrate important moments together, Tom Dunn concludes, "Tilles Center is more than a stage; it's a cultural sanctuary where the world's finest artists and our community converge, creating an enduring legacy for generations to come."



## UPenn taps venture capitalist Ramanan Raghavendran to lead board of trustees



**Ramanan Raghavendran**  
*(Image courtesy: penntoday.upenn.edu)*

**New York:** The University of Pennsylvania has appointed the managing partner and co-founder of Amasia, a global venture capital firm focused on climate and sustainability as the Chair of its Board of Trustees effective immediately.

Ramanan Raghavendran, a Penn alumnus, succeeds Scott L. Bok, who served as Chair since July 2021, before stepping down in December 2023. Julie Beren Platt, who has been serving as Interim Chair, will return to her role as Vice Chair.

Raghavendran holds three Penn degrees, earning a BSE in Computer Science and Engineering from Penn Engineering, a BS in Economics from the Wharton School, and a

## Another Hindu temple 'attacked' with pro-Khalistan graffiti in California

**Hayward, CA:** A Hindu temple in the US state of California was allegedly defaced with pro-Khalistan graffiti, the Hindu American Foundation (HAF) said on January 5, 2024. The incident took place weeks after the Swaminarayan Mandir in California was vandalized with anti-India graffiti.



*(Image courtesy: Hindustan Times)*

"Another Bay Area Hindu temple attacked with pro-#Khalistan graffiti. The Vijay's Sherawali Temple in Hayward, CA sustained a copycat defacement just two weeks after the Swaminarayan Mandir attack and one week after a theft at the Shiv Durga temple in the same area," the HAF wrote on social media X. The foundation added that it was in touch with temple leaders and contact with the Alameda Police Department and Civil Rights Division.

Last month, the US state department had condemned the vandalism of the Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in California. It welcomed the Newark Police Department's efforts to hold the culprits accountable.

"We condemn the vandalism of Shri Swaminarayan Mandir Hindu Temple in California. We welcome efforts by the Newark Police Department to ensure that those responsible are held accountable," the official handle of the US state department for the bureau of south and central Asian affairs wrote on X.

The statement came after suspected pro-Khalistan activists allegedly defaced the Swaminarayan temple in Newark, California. The incident, which surfaced on December 23, involved the vandalism of the Hindu temple's exterior wall with anti-India graffiti.

"One of the devotees, who lives close to the shrine, discovered anti-Hindu and anti-India graffiti in black ink on an exterior wall of the building, and the local administration was immediately informed," said Bhargav Raval, the spokesperson for the temple administration.

External affairs minister S Jaishankar, too, expressed concern over the vandalism of a Hindu temple with anti-India graffiti in the US and said extremists and separatist forces outside India should not get such space.

Meanwhile, Newark police termed the incident a 'targeted act' and assured a thorough investigation.

**I believe great American universities, like the University of Pennsylvania, are the most important repositories of all that defines, and is good and laudable about, our modern civilization**

Master of Liberal Arts from Penn Arts and Sciences. He is currently enrolled in Stanford University's Master of Liberal Arts program.

"I believe great American universities, like the University of Pennsylvania, are the most important repositories of all that defines, and is good and laudable about, our modern civilization," Raghavendran said in a statement. "We are united in supporting the mission of this incredible institution."

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# THE YEAR THAT WAS: TOP STORIES OF 2023

## PM Modi's US state visit: Biden welcomes with White House pomp



(Image courtesy: eurasiareview.com)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi marked his state visit in June 2023 by launching new partnerships in defense, semiconductor manufacturing and more sectors as the leaders looked to strengthen their countries' crucial relationship.

Modi's busy itinerary included an address to Congress, a lavish White House state dinner hosted by Biden and First Lady Jill Biden, Yoga Day celebration in New York, and meets with high-profile industry experts and community leaders.

## Historic victory for Hindu Americans: Gov Newsom vetoed California Caste Bill SB-403

On October 7, 2023 California Governor Gavin Newsom vetoed SB-403, the so-called California Caste Bill that would have explicitly outlawed caste discrimination in California, dealing a blow to activists hoping to make the state the first in the nation to enact such a ban.

Opponents contended that

the legislation would have stigmatized Hindus and people from South Asia, where caste is historically most closely associated. Representatives for the Hindu American Foundation had previously promised to challenge it in court. The veto was a victory for national Hindu groups such as the Hindu American Foundation and the

Coalition of Hindus of North America, which fiercely lobbied lawmakers to oppose the bill.

The law would have inserted caste into the definition of ancestry, making it illegal to discriminate on the basis of caste under the Unruh Civil Rights Act, Fair Employment and Housing Act and education discrimination law.

## US got its largest Hindu Mandir with the opening of Swaminarayan Akshardham



(Image provided)

It was a moment of jubilation, a moment that transcended borders, cultures, and continents. BAPS, a global spiritual and humanitarian organization, celebrated the grand opening of the Swaminarayan Akshardham in Robbinsville, New Jersey on Octo-

ber 8, 2023, in a spectacular event that left hearts brimming with joy and gratitude. Hundreds of thousands of individuals from across the globe witnessed this historic celebration, which marked not only the unveiling of a magnificent Hindu mandir but also a gift to the world – the largest Hindu mandir in the United States.

BAPS Swaminarayan Akshardham, a marvel of Hindu art, architecture, and culture, stands as a testament to the rich heritage and traditions of the Indian community. It serves as a bridge between the Asian Indian diaspora and the diverse American audience, inviting all to explore the spiritual and cultural treasures it holds within its sacred walls.

The grand dedication ceremony was breathtaking to behold, filled with joy, fun, and dedication. As fireworks illuminated the night sky, they symbolized the spirit of celebration that lit up the hearts of all those in attendance.

## Khalistani radicals set Indian Consulate in San Francisco on fire

In July 2023 India's consulate in San Francisco came under an attack from Khalistan supporters who tried to set the diplomatic facility on fire in the second such act of violence within months, drawing strong condemnation from the US government which termed it a "criminal offense".

A video by Khalistan supporters, dated July 2 posted on Twit-

ter, showed the act of arson at the Indian Consulate in San Francisco.

The video, with the words "violence begets violence" emblazoned over it, also showed news articles related to the death of Canada-based Khalistan Tiger Force (KTF) chief Hardeep Singh Nijjar.

Nijjar, one of India's most-wanted terrorists who carried a cash reward of Rs 10 lakh on his head,

was shot dead outside a gurdwara in Canada in June 2023.

On March 19, 2023 a group of pro-Khalistan protesters attacked and damaged the Indian Consulate in San Francisco. Raising pro-Khalistan slogans, the protesters broke open the makeshift security barriers raised by the city police and installed two so-called Khalistani flags inside the Consulate premises. Two consulate personnel soon removed these flags.

## NYC officially declared Diwali a public school holiday

Diwali is officially a New York City public school holiday, Mayor Eric Adams announced in June 2023. The announcement came after state lawmakers approved a bill, first introduced in 2021 and reintroduced in 2022. Supporters had been attempting to get the date on the public school calendar for decades. Rep. Grace Meng had introduced a bill in Congress to make



(Image provided)

Diwali a federal holiday. Under the Diwali Day Act, Diwali became the 12th federally recognized holiday in the United States.

## 1million attended the Art of Living's World Culture Festival in DC



(Image courtesy: TNIE)

The iconic National Mall in Washington DC from September 29 to October 1st, 2023 was witness to an event of grand proportions, with an unprecedented and record-breaking one million people gathering there to be part of The Art of Living's World Culture Festival, as people from 180 countries converged for the plan-

et's biggest festival of humanity, peace and culture.

The event saw the coming together of global dignitaries, enthralling music and colorful dance performances by Grammy Award Winners and other renowned artists with a common message of celebrating the One World Family.

## GOP rivals Haley and Ramaswamy showed rising political power of Indian Americans

Though they are polling far behind former President Donald Trump in the race for the 2024 nomination, Nikki Haley and Vivek Ramaswamy represent the growing political influence of Americans of Indian descent and are a reminder of the nuanced views within the Indian diaspora. Haley

and Ramaswamy exemplify the diversity of views among Indian Americans.

A former South Carolina governor and later UN ambassador for Trump, Haley generally aligns with the party's traditional establishment, particularly when it comes to foreign policy. The 51-year-old has called for continued support for Ukraine in its war with Russia and has portrayed the 38-year-old Ramaswamy as untested in world affairs.

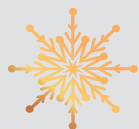
A biotech entrepreneur, Ramaswamy has pilloried the GOP's establishment wing and questioned the need for continuing to back Ukraine.



(Image courtesy: people.com)



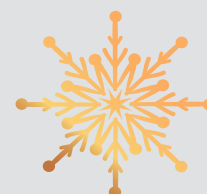
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## Minita Sanghvi is running for New York State Senate



**Mumbai-born Minita Sanghvi is Saratoga Springs Finance Commissioner**

(Image courtesy: teamlpac.com)

**Saratoga Springs, NY:** Saratoga Springs Finance Commissioner and Democrat Minita Sanghvi announced her candidacy for the 44th State Senate District in New York's Capital Region.

The district, which includes Saratoga County, Niskayuna, and the City of Schenectady, is currently represented by Republican incumbent Jim Tedisco, who had represented a different district for decades before choosing to run in the 44th District after redistricting. Registered Democrats outnumber Republicans by nearly 6,000 in the district and President

lic servant. And I've built a record of listening to people and working with others to deliver results."

Born to a conservative family of entrepreneurs and innovators in India, Sanghvi was taught by her parents to work hard, stand up for others, and serve her community. After earning a degree in accounting and an MBA, and working in advertising, Sanghvi immigrated to the United States in 2001 because America offered her the opportunity to be herself and pursue her dream of getting married and raising a family.

After working as an Assistant Manager at WalMart, in corporate marketing, and starting her own business, Sanghvi found her passion in educating college students and has been teaching business at Skidmore College for nearly ten years.

Biden beat Donald Trump by 12 percentage points in 2020.

"I'm running for State Senate because we deserve better," said Sanghvi. "We need a leader who will put people ahead of partisan politics in Albany. I'm not a politician. I'm a parent, business educator, and fiscally responsible pub-

## ICC Men's T20 World Cup: Indian-origin cricketer set to lead team USA

**New York:** International Cricket Council (ICC) has unveiled the schedule for the upcoming ICC Men's T-20 Cricket World Cup in June. This edition of the mega event will witness a total of 55 matches played across West Indies and America.

It marks a historic moment as the T-20 Cricket World Cup is being hosted in the United States for the first time. The American cricket team will participate in the tournament as co-hosts.

The captaincy of the American cricket team has been entrusted to Monank Patel. Monank is a talented Indian cricketer from Gujarat. He was born in Anand on May 1, 1993.

Monank is not only a right-handed batsman but also a proficient wicketkeeper. His cricket journey began with playing for Gujarat in



**Monank Patel**  
(Image courtesy: odishatv.in)

the Under-16 and Under-18 teams.

Monank has been an integral part of American cricket since 2018. He was the leading run-scorer in the 2018-19 ICC World Twenty20 Americas Qualifier tournament. He garnered 208 runs in six matches in the tournament.

The India-origin cricketer also made history in the 2018-19 Regional Super50 tournament in the West Indies by scoring the first century by an American batsman. He concluded the competition as the leading run-scorer for the United States with a total of 290 runs in seven matches.

## Ex-Twitter CEO Parag Agrawal raises \$30 million for new AI startup



The funding was led Khosla Ventures, Index Ventures and First Round Capital (Image courtesy: business-standard.com)

**New York:** Former Twitter CEO Parag Agrawal has raised \$30 million for his new artificial intelligence (AI) startup, according to a report by The Economic Times. The Indian-origin entrepreneur was fired from the social media platform by Elon Musk after his takeover in late 2022.

The funding was led by Vinod Khosla's Khosla Ventures, which was an early backer for Open AI, the company responsible for ChatGPT. Other venture firms included

Index Ventures and First Round Capital.

Agrawal's startup will reportedly be building software for large language model developers, similar to what is used by OpenAI's chatbot.

## USISPF joins Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit as partner organization

**New York:** The US-India Strategic Partnership Forum (USISPF) on Tuesday announced its association as a partner organization with the Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit 2024 from January 10th to 12th, 2024, in Gandhinagar.

"USISPF is honored to lead a delegation comprising over 35 Fortune American companies, including Salesforce, Abbott, Blackstone, HSBC, UPS, Micron, Cisco, SHRM, and others. These companies also have plans to increase their investments in Gujarat.

The delegation will be led by Lal Karanbhai, President and CEO of Emerson,

and co-led by USISPF President & CEO Dr. Mukesh Aghi," the USISPF stated in an official release.

As part of the engagement at the summit, USISPF hosted two insightful panel discussions on January 11 on the themes of the US-India Innovation Handshake and US-India Partnership.

In the US-India Innovation Handshake, the USISPF focused on accelerating the Start-Up Ecosystem in partnership with iCreate, this panel explored avenues to catalyze innovation and foster collaboration in the vibrant start-up ecosystem of both countries.

Additionally, under the US-India Partnership theme, the USISPF explored Opportunities for Manufacturing and Global Value Chains. This panel delved into the vast opportunities for collaboration in manufacturing and global value chains, showcasing the potential for growth and mutual benefit.



(Image courtesy: theblunttimes.in)



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# A look back at US Politics in 2023

The year was filled with lots of standout political moments and events.

Here's a look back at some of them, from Capitol Hill drama and another consequential Supreme Court decision to the Republican primary and the political toll of wars abroad.

## The GOP primary begins

With his quasi-incumbent status, former President Donald Trump maintains a big lead. Candidates have come and gone, including former Vice President Mike Pence. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis is putting all his chips on Iowa, which kicks off voting in less than three weeks. Former South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley gained momentum toward the end of the year and is hoping she can catch Trump and do well,



(Image: Pinterest)

especially in New Hampshire. Overall, the GOP candidates have spent \$240 million on TV ads, largely in the two big early nominating states.

## George Santos was expelled

Congress had had enough of the international man of mystery and kicked him out Dec. 1. He's only the third member of Congress to be booted since the Civil War – and the first to be without having been convicted of a crime first. Santos does face criminal charges and is expected to face a trial next year. Meanwhile, Democratic Sen. Bob Menendez of New Jersey is also facing charges of acting as a foreign agent for Egypt, and some in his own party have called for him to step aside.



(Image: Pinterest)



(Image: WMSM)

Rep. Mike Johnson of Louisiana – after multiple other possibilities were rejected by the hard right of the party.

## The saga of Kevin McCarthy

The California congressman started the year off by compromising his way into the speakership and weakened his hand so much it led to his undoing by the end of it. He lasted just nine months on the job and became the first House speaker removed from the job in U.S. history. A new speaker was sworn in –

## The wars involving Ukraine and Israel

Ukrainians are still entrenched and trying to stave off Russia's nearly two-year attempted takeover of the former Soviet-bloc country. It has been able to do so with the financial backing – and arms – from Western allies. President Biden is promising more funding, but Republicans are growing weary of the extra spending. In Israel, Hamas' Oct. 7 killing spree and abductions of Israelis set off a bloody response from Israel that has divided Americans. Biden is having to watch his left flank, as younger Americans and voters of color are less likely to support standing firm with Israel, a longstanding U.S. ally.



(Image: Al Jazeera)

## Biden announces run for reelection

Despite his mediocre poll standings and many Americans believing he's too old to be president, President Biden announced in April he is running for reelection. The country is careening toward a 2020 rematch of Biden and Trump with both men unpopular and either at or approaching 80 years old. Biden has the lowest approval rating 11 months



(Image: Flickr)

before a reelection bid of any president since Harry Truman. And Trump is even less liked. It could very well mean an ugly 2024.

## Trump becomes first former president to face criminal charges

Trump is facing 91 federal and state criminal counts, including conspiracy to defraud the United States and engaging in a criminal enterprise by attempting to overturn the 2020 election, as well as willful retention of national defense information because of classified documents he didn't give back. Trump's team is trying its best to dismiss and delay the trials until after the 2024 election, and the GOP primary will likely be decided long before there's a verdict in any of his trials regardless.



(Image: YouTube)

## Supreme Court guts affirmative action

For the second year in a row, the conservative-leaning Supreme Court issued a controversial and consequential ruling. In 2022, it was the Dobbs decision that overturned Roe v. Wade and stripped away the guaranteed right to an abortion. That continued to reverberate in politics, helping Democrats win off-year elections in Virginia, Kentucky and Ohio. In 2023, it was an affirmative action ruling that effectively ended race-conscious admission programs at colleges and universities. The decision, which reversed decades of precedent, means colleges and universities can no longer consider race as one of many factors in admissions.



(Image: Wikipedia)

## The age of aging lawmakers

Biden has faced persistent questions about his age, but there are also lots of octogenarians serving in Congress. That was underscored by a moment in the halls of Congress when Republican Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, 81, of Kentucky froze during a press conference. It highlighted the advanced age of many in Congress and had many asking, how old is too old to serve in public office?



(Image: YouTube)

## The loss of prominent women in politics

This year saw the deaths of former first lady Rosalynn Carter, former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor and former Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif. Carter and her husband, former President Jimmy Carter, were married longer than any other presidential couple in history – 77 years. She was a noted mental health advocate and became known for her charitable works after leaving the White House.

O'Connor was the first woman to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court and faced steep obstacles in getting there. Despite being a top student at Stanford Law in the 1950s, she struggled to find a job, eventually taking an unpaid position to work



(Image: Flickr)

in a local district attorney's office, where she proved herself.

Feinstein was California's first female senator, authored the 1994 assault weapons ban and, as the first woman to chair the Senate Intelligence Committee, defied two presidents when she forced the release of her committee's investigation into torture used against terror suspects.



## Haley and DeSantis tear into each other's records in Iowa



One rare point of agreement was that Trump should have been onstage too (Image: X)

**Des Moines, Iowa:** In their most hostile encounter yet, Nikki Haley and Ron DeSantis attacked each other early and often in Wednesday's Republican primary debate rather than focus on Donald Trump, the absent front-runner, as both tried to demonstrate they were the strongest alternative to the former president.

DeSantis and Haley called each other liars and insulted each other's records and character in the opening minutes of the debate. They seemed to relish the chance to go head to head without their lower-polling rivals interrupting, as in past debates. The two Republicans instead drilled into each other's policy ideas and directed viewers to dueling fact-checking websites their campaigns set up.

The one-on-one format displayed their sharp differences over issues ranging from foreign

policy to abortion less than a week before the Republican primary process begins in Iowa. But it was unclear whether the debate could reshape a race that's been dominated by Trump.

Standing at lecterns an arm's length apart, DeSantis and Haley fired off detailed critiques and sarcastic quips from the beginning.

"You're so desperate. You're just so desperate," the former

U.N. ambassador interrupted DeSantis at one point.

The Florida governor in turn said Haley's "got this problem with ballistic podiatry, shooting herself in the foot every other day."

In one of her most brutal critiques, Haley ridiculed DeSantis for the turmoil within his political operation, with several rounds of personnel changes and new strategies along with the millions spent on his behalf.

## 'Obamacare' sign-ups surge to 20 million

**Washington:** Some 20 million people have signed up for health insurance this year through the Affordable Care Act marketplaces, a record-breaking figure.

President Joe Biden will likely proclaim those results regularly on the campaign trail for months to come as former President Donald Trump, the Republican front-runner, vows to dismantle the Obama-era program.

The Biden administration announced Wednesday morning that 20 million have enrolled for coverage on the marketplace, days before the open enrollment period is set to close on Jan. 16.



The latest enrollment projections mean a quarter more Americans have signed up for coverage in 2023 (Image: Health News)

Although open enrollment for health insurance plans purchased through the Affordable Care Act ends on Jan. 16., people who have been removed from Medicaid may be eligible to enroll through the end of July.

## NYC issues vacate orders to stabilize historic Jewish sites

**New York:** New York building officials have issued emergency work orders to stabilize a historic synagogue and its neighboring structures after an illicit underground tunnel was discovered at the sanctuary earlier this week.

An investigation by the city's Department of Buildings uncovered a tunnel that was 60-foot-long, 8-foot-wide and 5-foot-high located underneath the global headquarters of

the Chabad Lubavitch movement, an important Jewish site. It extends under several buildings in the vicinity.

"We have issued emergency work orders to stabilize the buildings above the tunnel, vacate orders in parts of the buildings to ensure occupant safety, and enforcement actions against the property owners for the illegal work," Andrew Rudansky, a spokesperson for the buildings department said.

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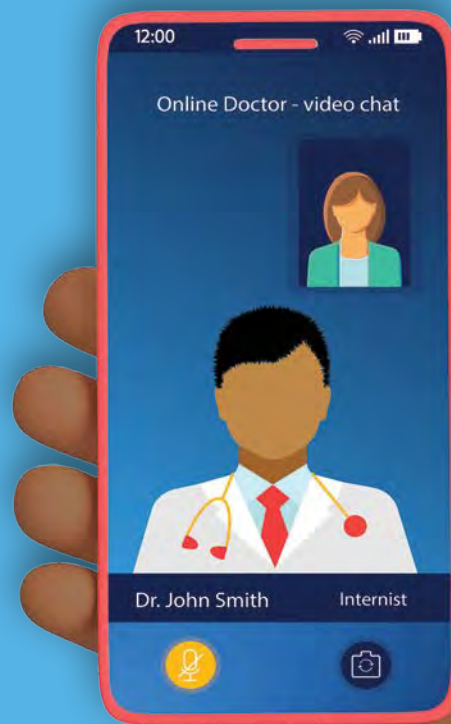
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## INDIA ROUNDUP 2023

### Of triumphs, turmoil and diplomatic tightropes -- India in 2023

A new Parliament, two successful space missions and an effective rescue mission to drill out people stuck inside a collapsed tunnel -- India had a lot to celebrate this year. But the ethnic violence in the Northeast, Khalistan menace, natural disasters and accidents were a blot on the country's 2023 chapter.

*A month-wise look at some of the key stories that shaped the country this year:*

#### JANUARY



Wrestlers Bajrang Punia, Vinesh Phogat and Sakshi Malik protesting at Jantar Mantar. (Photo courtesy: ians.in)

Led by Vinesh Phogat, Sakshi Malik, and Bajrang Punia, several wrestlers staged a dharna at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi, demanding that Wrestling Federation of India be disbanded, its president be sacked, and a probe be conducted into sexual misconduct allegations.

#### FEBRUARY

Delhi's Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia was arrested after around eight hours of interrogation by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) regarding the alleged irregularities in the now-scrapped Delhi excise policy.

#### MARCH



On March 23, a Gujarat magisterial court convicted Congress leader Rahul Gandhi for his remarks on the Modi surname. (Photo courtesy: X@RahulGandhi)

Elections were held in the Northeast, and the BJP emphatically won the Tripura Assembly elections and returned to power in Meghalaya and Nagaland as a junior partner in ruling coalitions.

Later in the month, senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi was disqualified from the Lok Sabha after his conviction in a criminal defamation case over his 'Modi surname' remark.

#### APRIL

The country also saw the encounter of a gangster-turned-politician Atiq Ahmed and his brother Ashraf who were shot dead in the presence of police personnel and media persons in Uttar Pradesh. A few days later, radical Sikh self-styled preacher and Waris Punjab De chief Amritpal Singh was arrested by the Punjab police from the Moga district after a month-long chase.

#### MAY



Clashes erupted between the majority Hindu Meitei community, and the minority Christian Kuki tribal community. (Photo courtesy: globalvoices.org)

Violent clashes broke out at various places in Manipur during the course of a 'Tribal Solidarity March' called on May 3 by the All Tribal Students' Union. The development reopened an old ethnic faultline in the state between the plain-dwelling Meitei community and the hill tribes.

Later in the month, India got a new Parliament building, 'embodying the culture, pride and spirit of the entire nation'. Built at an estimated cost of Rs 971 crore, sitting adjacent to the existing Parliament House, the building can accommodate 888 parliamentarians in the Lok Sabha and 300 in the Rajya Sabha, up from the existing 543 and 250, respectively.

#### JUNE



The Railways recommended a CBI probe into the train accident. (Photo courtesy: zeebiz.com)

Over 280 people were killed and more than 1000 injured after a horrific collision involving the Chennai-bound Coromandel Express, the SMVT Bengaluru-Howrah Express and a goods train took place near Bahanaga Bazar station in Odisha on June 2.

The Coromandel, instead of going past the goods train on the main line, entered the loop and smashed into the goods train from the rear.

#### JULY

Himachal Pradesh endured a difficult period battling extreme weather situations leading to devastating landslides, widespread damage and collapse of several buildings. According to the government's assessment, the state suffered a loss of Rs 12,000 crore. However, a silver lining to the tumultuous month was the launch of India's moon mission, Chandrayaan-3, on July 14.

#### AUGUST



(Courtesy: science.nasa.gov)

Chandrayaan-3 scripted history by successfully landing on the lunar surface on August 23. With the Lander accomplishing a 'soft landing' on the Moon's south pole, India became the only country to have ever done so.

On the political front, the Congress breathed a sigh of relief as their senior leader Rahul Gandhi returned to Parliament after the Supreme Court stayed his conviction in a 2019 criminal defamation case.

#### SEPTEMBER



(credit: X@TheUnderLineIN)

This month was all about the G20 Summit in New Delhi as leaders from the most powerful nations in the world flocked to the capital.

The culmination of India's year-long presidency of the G20, the summit concluded with the adoption of a G20 Leaders' Declaration.

Following the summit, a diplomatic spat ensued between India and Canada after PM Justin Trudeau claimed that Indian agents were involved in the killing of Khalistan leader, Hardeep Singh Nijjar outside a Gurdwara in Surrey.

#### OCTOBER

Over 70 people were killed, including Army personnel, in Sikkim after the South Lhonak Lake — a glacial lake situated in the state's northwest at 17,000 ft — burst due to incessant rains, leading to the release of water in downstream areas.

#### NOVEMBER



Rescue workers celebrating the successful completion of the mission. (Photo courtesy: X@Wyni16)

The states of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Telangana and Mizoram went to the polls this month amidst high-octane campaigning and poll promises to set the tone ahead of the big 2024 Lok Sabha polls.

With bated breath and prayers, India witnessed the mammoth rescue operation to drill out 41 workers who were trapped following a tunnel collapse in Uttarakhand.

Rescuers reached the trapped men, capping an operation that lasted over 400 hours.

#### DECEMBER



The breach happened during the Zero Hour in the Lok Sabha. (Photo courtesy: X@DrSenthil\_MDRD)

With its landslide win in Madhya Pradesh, and having overturned Congress governments in Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance came to power in 17 states and Union Territories.

On the 22nd anniversary of the Parliament attack, in a major security breach, two men jumped into the Lok Sabha chamber from the visitors' gallery on December 13, raised slogans and opened canisters that emitted yellow smoke, triggering panic among the MPs.

(With Indian Express inputs)



# MAHARASHTRA CRISIS: Govt survives, no MLAs disqualified

removing any immediate threats to the survival of the state government.

While the ruling Shiv Sena welcomed the verdict with celebrations, distribution of sweets and 'V' signs calling it as the "triumph of truth", the opposition Shiv Sena-UBT termed it as a "murder of democracy and the Constitution" and vowed to challenge it in the Supreme Court.

In his detailed judgement on the issue, the Speaker held that the group led by Shinde was the real "Shiv Sena" as it commanded a majority in the legislature and also in the party's National Executive.

Narwekar also rejected the changes in the leadership structure by Thackeray in 2018, saying they were not in conformity with the Shiv Sena Constitution of 1999, nor was there a record of these amendments with the Election Commission.

The Speaker further held that the then Chief Whip Sunil Prabhu ceased to reflect the will of the



Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde. (India.com)

party to continue in the post, and said that the breakaway faction's Gogawale was the validly-elected Chief Whip after the rival factions emerged on June 21, 2022.

The rulings by the Speaker in his much-awaited verdict came as a huge relief to Shinde but dealt a major blow to Thackeray, whose faction had contested the claims of the breakaway group.

With the disqualification petitions of both sides getting dismissed by the Speaker, Shinde is left with the original Shiv Sena, the validity of the Chief Whip, and all the 16 MLAs will not be disqualified, while Thackeray has lost the party founded by his father, the late Balasaheb Thackeray, but none of his 14 MLAs have been disqualified.

The Speaker has rejected several other claims and contentions and arguments of the Shiv Sena-UBT challenging the Shinde faction, and Thackeray termed it as "a plot, murder of democracy and contempt of the Supreme Court", especially after Narwekar met Shinde on Sunday, just three days before his expected verdict.

Thackeray said that now a new route has been shown to break and take away parties through the legislature route which is tantamount to a contempt of the apex court, and demanded that the Supreme Court should initiate suo moto proceedings against the Speaker who had violated all the directives of the apex court.

Reiterating that he had predicted the outcome of "match-fixing" on Tuesday itself, Thackeray reaffirmed that the Shiv Sena cannot be eliminated by such tactics, "the Shiv Sena can never belong to Shinde" and asserted that the legal battle will continue in the court.

**Mumbai:** In a significant but "please-all" verdict, Maharashtra Assembly Speaker Rahul Narwekar has recognized the faction led by Chief Minister Eknath Shinde as the "real" Shiv Sena, but declined to disqualify the MLAs of both groups, including the Shiv Sena-UBT led by ex-CM Uddhav Thackeray, and ensured the survival of the ruling MahaYuti government.

The Speaker, in his much-awaited verdict read out over more than 100 minutes, rejected the disqualification petitions filed by both the ruling Shiv Sena and Shiv Sena-UBT, and recognised the Shiv Sena's Bharat Gogawale as the Chief Whip, on various grounds.

Accordingly, the threat of disqualification of all the 16 Shiv Sena MLAs, including Chief Minister Shinde, and the 14 MLAs of Shiv Sena-UBT was dispelled,

## Congress slammed for not attending Ram Mandir inauguration

**New Delhi:** BJP leader Smriti Irani has slammed the Congress for turning down the invitation to attend the Ram Mandir inauguration on January 22.

"It is not surprising that the Congress will not attend the inauguration of Ram Mandir. Sonia Gandhi has even filed documents saying that there is no relevance of Lord Ram. Today, Congress has proved again what it stands for after refusing to go to the Pran Pratishtha of Ram Lalla in Ayodhya," Irani said.

She said that Congress and other political parties of "INDI alliance" also proved that they are against Sanatan Dharma.

The Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra had invited leaders from various political parties for

the inauguration ceremony of Ram Mandir on January 22.

The invitation was also sent to Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi, Mallikarjun Kharge, and Adir Ranjan Choudhary

However, Congress has declined the invitation for the inauguration of Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, saying that Lord Ram is worshipped by millions of people and the religion is a personal matter however the RSS and BJP have made a political project of the temple in Ayodhya.

"Honouring the sentiments of millions who revere Lord Ram, Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge, Sonia Gandhi and Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury have respectfully declined the invitation to what is clearly a RSS/BJP event," the Congress in a statement said.



Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge and Sonia Gandhi have declined the invitation. (File photo)

## Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit attracts billions in investments



PM Modi with visiting heads of state/government and other participating dignitaries at the 10th Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit. (PIB)

**Gandhinagar:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said that all major agencies have estimated that India will be in the top three economies of the world in the coming years. He also said that India has inked important MoUs with the United Arab Emirates, planning investments worth billions in Gujarat and other states.

India's two richest businessmen - Gautam Adani and Mukesh Ambani - took the stage during the Vibrant Gujarat Global summit and talked about the future of the conglomerates in the state. They also announced investments worth billions in Gujarat in the coming years.

India's richest man Gautam Adani announced during the Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit 2024 that his company Adani Groups will invest \$24 billion in Gujarat over

the next five years. He said that this will create 1 lakh jobs in Gujarat.

Further, Gautam Adani said that his firm will invest around \$100 billion towards the shift to green energy in the country over the course of 10 years.

Reliance Industries chairman Mukesh Ambani said that his firm will be setting up India's first and world-class carbon fibre facility at Hazira, Gujarat. Ambani further said that Reliance will set up a green energy giga complex on 5,000 acres in Jamnagar in 2024.

Mukesh Ambani confirmed India's bid for the 2036 Olympics, and said that Reliance will assist the authorities in developmental projects regarding the same.

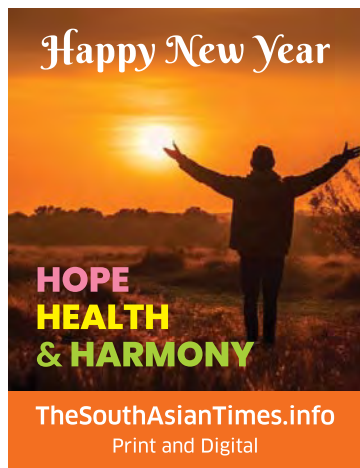
Tata Group Chairman N Chandrasekaran announced during the Gujarat summit that the company is planning to build a semicon-

ductor fab in Gujarat's Dholera, and it will begin operations in 2024 itself. Further, Tata Group will also construct a 20 gigawatt lithium ion storage battery factory in the state's Sanand over the next two months.

Suzuki Motor Corporation President Toshihiro Suzuki said at the summit that the global auto company will invest Rs 35,000 crore to set up its second manufacturing facility in Gujarat.

Dutch and Singapore firms announced investments worth over \$7 billion in India in the upcoming financial year.

ArcelorMittal chairman Lakshmi Mittal announced that his firm will build the world's single biggest steel manufacturing factory at Hazira in Gujarat by 2029, having a capacity of 24 million tonnes per annum.



# 2023: A Year of War, Turmoil, Crisis and Hope

However, Prigozhin abruptly ended his so-called "march of justice" after Belarus's Alexander Lukashenko brokered a deal to allow him and his forces to come to his country. Prigozhin was later killed in August in a plane explosion in Russia.

destabilized several Middle Eastern countries, including Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen and Bahrain.

2023 was another unprecedented year — from a former US president being criminally indicted to a Speaker of the House of Representatives being removed — both for the first time in the country's nearly 250-year history.

Beyond politics, the US and Canada witnessed a suspected Chinese spy balloon float across North America; the world watched, listened and waited for any sign from the ill-fated Titan submersible on its voyage to the Titanic wreckage site; and every nation lived through increasingly extraordinary weather related to global climate change.

Notable occurrences include India surpassing China as the world's most populous country, Henry Kissinger's death and the Hamas-Israel conflict.

Here's a recap of all major world events in 2023:

## Hamas' attack on Israel



(Image: Flickr)

Palestinian militant group Hamas executed a significant attack on Israel in the early hours of October 7. The attack, which came at the 50th anniversary of the Yom Kippur War, is regarded as one of the worst Israeli intelligence failures since its creation in 1948.

According to the Israeli government, more than 1,200 people have lost their lives in Israel with 6,900 others injured. The Israeli Defence Force (IDF) said 383 soldiers have been killed since the October 7 raid. Israeli authorities also say that Palestinian groups also took more than 240 people captive during the attack, some of which have been released in truce deals later.

"Hamas's attack on Israel on October 7 is the third-deadliest terrorist attack since data collection began in 1970, based on the number of fatalities, with the 9/11 attacks representing the worst mass fatality terrorist attack," Australian think tank CSIS observed.

## Russian Mutiny



(Image: YouTube)

The chief of Russia's Wagner Private Military Company, Yevgeny Prigozhin, staged a short-lived mutiny on June 24 this year. His act pushed the Vladimir Putin regime into an unprecedented internal security crisis. Leading a convoy of armed men and armoured vehicles towards Moscow, he demanded the ouster of Russia's top defence brass.

His move created alarm elsewhere after news of the takeover of Russia's Southern Military District headquarters in Rostov-on-Don, the largest city in southern Russia, surfaced.

## Henry Kissinger's death



(Image: YouTube)

2023 witnessed the deaths of many key global figures, from Pakistan's last dictator President Pervez Musharraf to former Chinese Premier Li Qiang. One among this list included the former US Secretary of State and National Security Adviser (NSA) Henry Kissinger.

The scholar-turned-diplomat presided over several historic events during his tenure including engineering the United States' opening to China, negotiating the US exit from Vietnam, and detente with the Soviet Union at the height of the Cold War. With his shuttle diplomacy, he edged Moscow out of its standing as a major power in the Middle East.

## BRICS Summit



(Image: Wikipedia)

The BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) bloc met for its annual leader's summit in Johannesburg on August 22-24. The BRICS summit is seen as one of India's biggest geopolitical wins of 2023. India was one of the key players in the admission of six new member countries: Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates (UAE). These global South countries will officially join the group in January 2024.

## Iran-Saudi détente



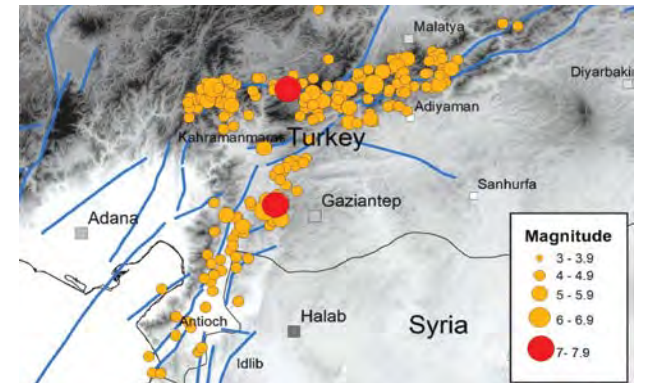
(Image: Flickr)

There was another key development that dominated the news cycle for weeks before the Israel-Hamas war dominated news cycle coming out of West Asia.

China managed to broker a surprise detente between Iran and Saudi Arabia in March. The duo have a history of centuries-old rivalry originating out of the sects of religion they represent.

The bitter rivalry between Sunni Saudi and Shia Iran has

## Turkey and Syria Earthquake

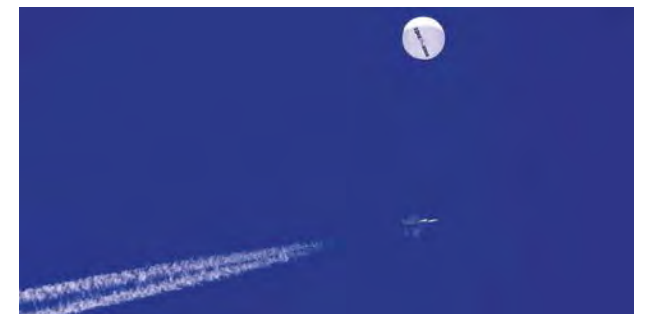


(Image: British Geological Survey)

In February, West Asian nations Turkey and Syria experienced powerful earthquakes. measuring 7.8 magnitude, followed by a second one of 7.5 magnitude. The strong earthquakes were accompanied by numerous strong aftershocks that led to building collapses.

The first earthquake in Turkey was the strongest in more than 20 years and was as strong as one in 1939, the most powerful recorded there. It was centered near Gaziantep in south-central Turkey.

## Chinese spy balloon



(Image: YouTube)

A Chinese spy balloon traversing the United States for a week in February 2023 dominated global headlines for several days. The balloon, detected over Alaska on January 28, crossed over some of the critical military facilities of the World's most powerful military including the Malmstrom Air Force base in Montana, a location housing nuclear assets.

The controversy resulting from this incident ultimately forced the USAF to dispatch a fifth-generation F-22 fighter armed with an AIM-9X Sidewinder missile to intercept the balloon over water.

## Titan Submersible incident



(Image: Joyride)

On June 18, 2023, the submersible named Titan disappeared in international waters in the North Atlantic Ocean near the coast of Newfoundland, Canada. It had five people onboard.

The US Coastal Guard later confirmed that all five passengers onboard had died as the vessel was subject to "catastrophic implosion". The debris of the submersible has been found around 500 meters away from the bow of the Titanic.



## Russia accused of using North Korean missiles against Ukraine



Eight countries warned that "each violation makes the world a much more dangerous place" (Image: X/@CNA)

**United Nations:** The United States, Ukraine and six allies accused Russia on Wednesday of using North Korean ballistic missiles and launchers in a series of devastating aerial attacks against Ukraine, in violation of U.N. sanctions.

Their joint statement, issued ahead of a Security Council meeting on Ukraine, cited the use of North Korean weapons during waves of strikes on Dec. 30, Jan. 2 and Jan. 6 and said the violations increase suffering of the Ukrainian people, "support Russia's brutal war of aggression, and under-

mine the global nonproliferation regime."

At the council meeting, Russia's U.N. Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia said the information came from U.S. National Security Council spokesman John Kirby, but he said representatives of the Ukrain-

ian air force "specifically said that Kyiv did not have any evidence of this fact."

U.N. political chief Rosemary DiCarlo told the council that Ukraine has suffered some of the worst attacks since Russia's February 2022 invasion in recent weeks.

## China to launch its next lunar explorer soon

**Beijing:** China's space agency said Wednesday that its latest lunar explorer had arrived at the launch site in preparation for a mission to the moon in the first half of this year.

State broadcaster CCTV posted photos on its website of the unit under wraps as it was unloaded from a large cargo airplane earlier this week and then transported by flatbed truck to the Wenchang launch site on southern China's Hainan island.

The announcement came a day after a U.S. company abandoned a lunar landing planned for Feb. 23 because of a fuel leak that started soon after takeoff on Monday.

China and the U.S. are both pursuing plans to land astronauts on the moon in what has become a growing rivalry in space. The U.S.



Four countries — the U.S., Russia, China and India — have landed spacecraft on the moon (Image: Tol)

plans to do so in 2026, and China's target date is before 2030.

## Hou promises to boost Taiwan's defense

**Taipei, Taiwan:** One of Taiwan's leading opposition party candidates in Saturday's presidential election has promised to boost the island's defense capabilities while restarting dialogue with Beijing, which claims the island as its own.

Hou Yu-ih, the presidential candidate from the opposition Kuomintang, or Nationalist Party,

on Thursday said he wants to "strengthen" Taiwan's ability to protect itself to deter a potential attack from China.

"We have to let them know they have to bear the cost of the war," Hou said during a news conference in New Taipei City, a municipality bordering the capital, Taipei.

Hou, 66, is mayor of New Tai-

pei, a position from which he took leave to run for president.

Hou also pledged to restart dialogue with Beijing — first through cultural and civil society exchanges — as part of his "3d" strategy, which stands for deterrence, dialogue and de-escalation.

Most pre-election polls place Hou second after the governing



Hou Yu-ih is the presidential candidate from the opposition Kuomintang, or the Nationalist Party (Image: X)

Democratic Progressive Party's candidate, William Lai, who currently serves as vice president under Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen. Tsai is barred by law from running a third term. A third candidate, Ko Wen-je, from the smaller Taiwan People's Party, is also running in the election.

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# Of terror, violence and political unrest | South Asia in 2023

Social tensions and domestic unrest continued to challenge the subcontinent with a surge in terrorism and violence in the year gone by. For many South Asian countries, 2023 was dominated by either elections or campaigning, as it was an election year or the penultimate year before elections. Amidst these political developments, the region continued to face challenges ranging from economic and political instability to humanitarian crises. A look at the major developments -

## Pakistan | A year of crisis for economy, politics, security



Massive protests followed former PM Imran Khan's arrest in May. (Photo courtesy: theprint.in)

The Pakistani rupee hit an all-time low, crossing the PKR 300 mark against the US dollar in August 2023. The country's for-

eign reserves with the State Bank of Pakistan (SPB) also dropped to an alarming level — at \$3.1 billion in January 2023. The Islamic nation finally reached a staff-level agreement with the IMF on a \$3 billion "nine-month Stand-by Arrangement (SBA)".

In May 2023, the country saw the arrest of a key political leader -- Imran Khan. He was accused of corruption, unlawfully selling gifts from foreign dignitaries and leaking state secrets among several other charges. Khan was disqualified from contesting the upcoming general elections in Pakistan.

Massive protests and violence had followed Imran Khan's dramatic arrest in

Islamabad. The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) announced that its founder and jailed leader would contest the 2024 general elections from at least three seats despite his arrest.

In another dramatic move, former Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif returned to Pakistan in October 2023 after a four-year self-imposed exile to lead his party in the general elections. Sharif is again gearing up to contest the 2024 elections from the Mansehra region of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa.

Several terror and suicide bombing incidents rocked Pakistan this year. At least 271 militant attacks took place in Pakistan

during the first half of 2023, resulting in the loss of 389 lives and injuring 656 individuals.



Former PM Nawaz Sharif ended his four-year-long self-imposed exile in October. (Photo courtesy: livemint.com)

## Afghanistan | 2 years after Taliban takeover

Afghanistan continues to grapple with an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. In 2023, a staggering 28.3 million people – or two-thirds of Afghanistan's population - required urgent humanitarian assistance to survive. Over 17 million people faced acute hunger in 2023, including 6 million people at emergency levels of food insecurity – one step away from famine.



Three earthquakes hit Afghanistan in the month of October alone. (Photo courtesy: X@VOANews)

To add to its woes, three catastrophic earthquakes struck western Afghanistan in the month of October alone, including one 6.3-magnitude on 7th, one 6.3-magnitude on 11th and a 6.4-magnitude earthquake on 15th. Almost 1,400 people are reported to have been killed in the first two major earthquakes.

Taliban authorities have continued to deny women and girls their rights, including

to education, work, movement, and assembly.

Thousands of Afghan refugees in Pakistan were evicted as part of the country's campaign to expel all 'illegal' foreigners in the country. The move has largely been seen as one targeting around 1.7 million undocumented Afghans in the country. As of December 26, up to 500,000 Afghans have already been expelled.

## Bangladesh | A year of turbulence

The nation's politics was extremely volatile throughout the year in anticipation of the general elections of January 7, 2024. Violent street clashes between police and protestors, and between activists from both incumbent and opposition parties, rose alongside widespread arrests of opposition leaders and demonstrators. The government scrapped the controversial Digital Security Act and replaced it with a new law called

the Cyber Security Act, which will reportedly limit freedom of expression.



Violent street clashes were witnessed in the poll-bound country. (Photo courtesy: bdnews24.com)

## Sri Lanka | On the road to economic recovery

Sri Lanka's economy showed signs of stabilisation in 2023 after the worst economic

and political crisis since its independence in 1948. The remarkable change

during 2023 can be traced to decisive policies by President Ranil Wickremesinghe's new government, formed in July 2022, after mass protests forced then president Gotabaya Rajapaksa to resign. The country is set to go to polls in September this year. India again emerged as a steadfast ally of Colombo, playing a pivotal role in the debt-trapped island nation's steady economic recovery.



India emerged as the strongest ally of the island nation. (Photo courtesy: X@narendramodi)

## Nepal | Setting the bilaterals right

Nepal witnessed much-needed political stability this year that enabled Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' to focus on improving relations with its two important neighbors – India and China – even as he faced the regular staple of Himalayan problems - earthquakes, corruption scandals, and air crashes.

## Bhutan and The Maldives

In the tiny landlocked kingdom of Bhutan, the first round of National Assembly elections took place on November 30, 2023. This will culminate in a runoff between the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the Bhutan Tendrel Party (BTP) scheduled for January 9, 2024.

In the Maldives' presidential elections on September 30, Mohamed Muizzu of the People's National Congress (PNC), in alliance with the Progressive Party of Maldives (PPM), emerged victorious

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# Second Diwali in India on Jan 22 as Ram Temple in Ayodhya gets consecrated

The newly built temple in Ayodhya would be opened for devotees after the consecration of the idol of Ram Lalla on January 22

The Shri Ram Janmbhoomi

Teerth Kshetra, a trust constituted to look after the construction and management of Shri Ram Janmbhoomi Mandir in Ayodhya, has announced key details related to Ram Lalla's idol consecration ceremony.

The consecration ceremony rituals will commence from January

16, a day after the Makar Sankranti.

The trust added that after the consecration ceremony, there will be a 48-day cycle of mandala puja (ritualistic worship) under the leadership of Vishwaprasanna Teerth

Ji, a revered figure. Around 4,000 saints have been invited to participate, from all sects.

Here are some glimpses of the magnificent mega-structure taking shape following strict adherence to the ancient Indian architecture rules.



(All Images Courtesy: Shri Ram Janmbhoomi Teerth Kshetra)

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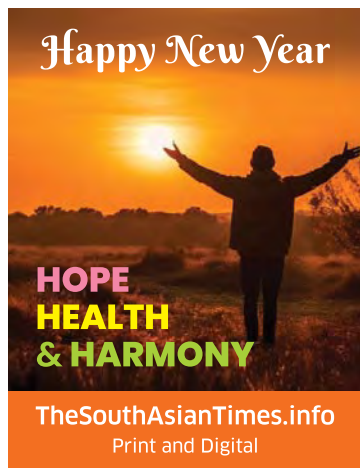
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# 2023: The year of AI, Big Tech regulation, EVs & more

2023 has been a pivotal year for technology, where generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) firmly established itself, initiating an era where it's no longer a futuristic concept but a tangible, integral reality. With the surge in AI also came government regulations on Big Tech.

## Artificial intelligence becomes a reality



2023 was an incredible year for artificial intelligence, with the industry witnessing record adoption, funding, and innovation in the technology. The year saw an exponential rise in the use of generative AI thanks to products like ChatGPT, Bard and IBM Watson.

The establishment of large foundation models lowered experimentation costs in generative AI, inviting businesses to look at ways to integrate it into their products. This development increased industry adoption and forced generative AI products to become secure and ethical.

The global generative AI market is worth over \$13 billion and is expected to cross \$22 billion by 2025.

Microsoft-backed OpenAI achieved a significant financial milestone in 2023, crossing the \$1 billion mark for the first time and reaching a remarkable \$1.6 billion in revenue.

According to Indian tech industry leaders, the coming year presents an exciting opportunity for purpose-driven organisations to better serve their communities as we advance in ways of using AI which will require more funding and expertise.

Around 59 per cent of employees in India are confident in their ability to adapt and utilise AI tools, indicating that there is likely to be widespread acceptance of AI at work in 2024.

About 71 per cent of enterprises globally are experimenting with real use cases for generative AI and over the next decade, generative AI will be the fulcrum that accelerates business growth.

## Electric Vehicles enters mainstream



With the introduction of new models and an expanding charging infrastructure, EVs are becoming more viable and appealing to consumers. The shift towards electric transportation is not only reducing carbon emissions but also reshaping the automotive industry.

India is at the forefront of adopting EVs but there is a long way to go. Vietnam's leading electric vehicle (EV) manufacturer VinFast and the Tamil Nadu state government have just announced a partnership to build a \$2 billion EV facility in the country, with an intended commitment of \$500 million for the first phase of the project.

Elon Musk-run Tesla is also slated to enter the Indian market very soon. As reports surfaced about the tech billionaire arriving in India to announce a Tesla manufacturing unit in Gujarat, the focus has once again shifted to ramp up the public infrastructure for electric vehicles (EVs) in the country in order to meet the ambitious 2030 goal of the government.

India needs to have a robust backbone for charging infrastructure across the length and breadth of the country with considerations of traffic and population density, as it aims to break the barriers for large-scale adoption of electric vehicles.

India's top nine cities, with a population of over 40 lakh each, would require 18,000 public EV charging stations by 2030, according to the recent government data.

Currently, more than 9,000 public EV charging stations are operational in the country with over 16,000 EV chargers.

India may need a minimum of 1.32 million charging stations by 2030 to facilitate the rapid adoption of electric vehicles (EVs), according to a recent report released by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII).

The country may see 1 crore electric vehicle (EV) sales annually by 2030, generating nearly 5 crore jobs, according to Nitin Gadkari, Union Minister of Road Transport and Highways.

India's EV market has the potential to achieve over 40 per cent penetration with \$100 billion revenue by 2030, a substantial increase from the current 5 per cent penetration.

## Big Tech faces intense government scrutiny



After US President Joe Biden issued an artificial intelligence (AI)-focused executive order in 2023, experts suggest it's only the beginning of AI regulation in the US, and globally.

Before issuing an executive order outlining general safeguards for AI use, Biden enlisted voluntary agreements from major companies leading the development of the tech including Google parent Alphabet, Facebook parent Meta Platforms, Amazon, Microsoft, OpenAI Inc. and Nvidia.

Companies across the world are working on AI but regulation in the U.S. specifically could serve as an international standard.

The EU also unveiled a set of "revolutionary" laws to curb the power of six big tech companies, including allowing consumers to decide what apps they want on their phone and

to delete preloaded software such as Google or Apple's maps apps. The Digital Markets Act (DMA), the second big package of EU laws to hit tech firms in two months, defines a series of obligations that gatekeepers need to comply with, including not engaging in anti-competitive practices.

The act follows the Digital Services Act, which came into force in August last year and aims to curb online hate, child sexual abuse and disinformation with the first laws ever governing online content.

The tech companies – including Apple, Google and Amazon – have six months to comply with a full list of dos and don'ts under the new laws, after which they could be fined up to 10% of their turnover. In Meta's case, this would be 10 percent of \$120 billion.

Britain's antitrust regulator will gain legal powers to tailor rules for big tech companies, such as Meta, Alphabet and Amazon, to ensure they treat businesses and consumers fairly, according to the King's Speech setting out the government's priorities.

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) in the UK has proposed "Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers" law.

A small group of big tech companies with designated status will have to comply with the rules. They could be fined up to 10 percent of global turnover for breaches under the proposed bill.

## India manufacturing comes to the fore



From mobile phones to semiconductors, India is set to rewrite the manufactory story and become a global hub soon.

The total production of electronic goods in India in FY23-24 is likely to reach \$115 billion, buoyed by mobile phones' local production which is estimated to exceed \$50 billion in the current fiscal year, according to the India Cellular and Electronics Association (ICEA).

The country has already crossed \$100 billion of electronics manufacturing in 2023 with a major contribution of \$44 billion by mobile phone manufacturing.

The country is also moving towards the localisation of other value chain items and substantial investments have been made in the localisation of mechanics, die cut parts, camera modules, display assemblies etc.

The government has set a target of achieving \$300 billion worth of electronics manufacturing by 2025-26, with \$100 billion expected to come from exports. Mobile phones alone are anticipated to contribute more than \$50 billion worth of exports by 2025-26.

Riding on the local manufacturing growth, mobile phone exports from the country have surpassed \$9 billion (more than Rs 75,000 crore) from April to November in the current fiscal year, industry data showed.

This stupendous growth is compared to \$6.2 billion (Over Rs 50,000 crore) during the same period last year.

(Photos: Twitter, file photos)



# India growth story shines amid global uncertainties

*At the beginning of this year, many economists predicted a mild recession in the US, a deeper one in Europe, and a robust rebound in China. There was no recession in the US, Europe managed well and China is struggling to regain its footing. Meanwhile, The Indian economy is expected to grow 7.3 per cent in the current fiscal year.*

## Taming inflation with rising rates



Central banks around the world increased interest rates across 2023 to try and tackle inflation, while attempting to balance this with a need to maintain growth.

Come the tail end of the year, many central banks have paused rate rises, with the European Central Bank, US Federal Reserve and the Bank of England all holding rates.

Many central banks haven't ruled out further rises next year, though, should they be necessary.

The US inflation rate is seen easing closer to the Federal Reserve's 2 per cent target in 2024 in the latest forecast from the Congressional Budget Office, as economic growth and labor market activity cools.

As the US inflation has been cooling of late, market participants are buying stocks aggressively, expecting the US Federal Reserve to start cutting interest rates as early as March next year.

## US shutdown scare

Throughout 2023, the Democrats and Republicans repeatedly clashed over budgetary matters in the US. The country came very close to a government shutdown in October 2023.

This came after an intense debate between the Democrats and Republicans over budget allocations. Earlier in the year, too, a confrontation over government expenditure had risked plunging the nation into a debt crisis.

Amid the buzz of a partial US shutdown on October 1, 2023, the Indian stock market opened with an upside gap and went on to extend its early morning gains further. However, it later witnessed a sharp correction.

## Indian market touched an all-time high



Benchmark index Nifty-50 scaled an all-time high level, and hit its fresh record high of 21,675.75 during the session on December 27.

The Sensex opened at 71,492.02 against the previous close of 71,336.80 and hit its fresh record high of 72,119.85 during the trade.

With this, the Indian market cap touched \$4 trillion for the first time in December. India is now the fifth-largest market in the world and stands tall among global economies. Only the US, China, Japan, and Hong Kong markets are currently ahead of India.

2023 has been the year of the IPO. The total number of IPOs this year crossed last year's tally, with 173 small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and 56 mainboard listings to date.

DIIs and FIIs invested \$12 billion and \$23 billion, respectively, in the Indian equity market till December 22. After being net sellers in FY22 and FY23, FIIs regained confidence in FY24 and the sentiment was further reinforced by the BJP's big-bang performance in the Assembly elections across three key states out of the four in the fray.

## Adani-Hindenburg row



Adani Group's troubles started after a report issued by Hindenburg late on January 24, 2023, claimed that many shareholders of Adani Group companies were offshore shell companies and funds were tied to the group itself.

Index funds and exchange-traded funds (ETFs) tracking the Nifty Next 50 Index corrected sharply in two weeks after the report came in. The index dropped by 7.4 per cent. The reason for this was that Adani Group stocks, which accounted for 14 per cent weightage in the index, came under heavy selling pressure after the Hindenburg report.

The Supreme Court has now dismissed reliance on the Hindenburg report and affirmed faith in SEBI's handling of the case.

Gautam Adani has reclaimed the Asia's richest person spot after beating Mukesh Ambani as shares of his company show major growth.

## Funding winter continues for startups, layoffs are on

Citing the global macroeconomic conditions, Big Tech firms and startups across the spectrum sacked employees, and layoffs continue to happen.

According to the latest data from layoff.fyi, a website that tracks tech sector job cuts, 1,178 tech companies laid off 260,771 lakh employees in 2023 alone.

On average, about 582 employees lost their jobs every day in the last two years – or more than 24 workers every hour.

Funding in India's tech startup ecosystem in 2023 has been the lowest in the last five years. The year received \$7 billion in total funding, a significant decline of 72 per cent,

**Funding in India's tech startup ecosystem in 2023 has been the lowest in the last five years. The year received \$7 billion in total funding, a significant decline of 72 per cent, compared to \$25 billion in the previous year**



compared to \$25 billion in the previous year.

Only two new unicorns were created this year -- Incred and Zepto -- as against 23 in the previous year and 119 acquisitions as compared to 187 acquisitions in 2022, a 36 per cent drop, according to the report by leading global market intelligence platform Tracxn.

The funding declined across all stages, with late-stage funding dropping over 73 per cent, followed by early-stage funding (70 per cent) and seed-stage funding (60 per cent).

Investments by private equity (PE) and venture capital (VC) funds to homegrown companies declined to \$27.9 billion across 697 transactions this year (as of December 20), compared to \$47.62 billion across 1,364 deals in 2022.

## Go First insolvency: From skies to the ground



Go First was one of the biggest names in the Indian aviation sector until it wasn't. On May 2, the airline said it was filing for voluntary insolvency proceedings and grounded its entire fleet.

The resolution process was initiated and several banks stated that no more funds should be given to Go First.

The airline blamed "faulty" engines by Pratt & Whitney and sought compensation. Its promoter, Nusli Wadia, recently said that the engines caused a loss of Rs 10,000 crore to the airline. The promoters also infused Rs 3,200 crore in the airline but it hasn't flown a single flight since May.

SpiceJet, another domestic carrier, has expressed its interest in acquiring Go First. However, there has been no final decision on either the acquisition or the insolvency.

(Photos: Twitter, file photos)



## India fall at final hurdle after dream run at cricket WC



(Photo courtesy: Times Now)

Rohit Sharma-led India produced one of the best performances by any side in the group stages of an ODI World Cup, winning 10 matches in a row to reach the final.

At the summit clash, the Men in Blue were put in on a slow surface and struggled their way to 240 runs, which was overhauled by Australia thanks to a century from Travis Head who helped his side win by six wickets and break a billion hearts.

## Virat Kohli attains ODI batting immortality



(Photo courtesy: ET)

On November 15 2013, Sachin Tendulkar was dismissed for the final time in international cricket in Mumbai. Exactly 10 years later, Virat Kohli broke Tendulkar's record for the most 50-over centuries, when he got to his 50th ODI hundred in the semi-final clash against New Zealand at the same venue.

## Neeraj Chopra becomes world champion



(Photo courtesy: Mint)

# Biggest sporting moments of the year

2023 proved to be yet another year when individual athletes and teams across different sports experienced some incredible highs and heartbreaking lows.

Neeraj Chopra had already put himself in contention as arguably India's greatest ever individual athlete by winning the gold medal in the javelin throw event at the Tokyo Olympics. He added yet another feather to his cap in 2023 when he became the first Indian athlete to be crowned world champion with a 88.17m effort at the competition held in Budapest.

## Djokovic crosses Nadal, equals all-time record



(Photo courtesy: TOI)

With Roger Federer retiring in 2022 and Rafael Nadal out injured since the start of the year, Novak Djokovic had the chance to make 2023 his own year. He started the year by equalling Nadal's tally of 22 Grand Slams, then went past him at Roland Garros and ended the year by winning the US Open to end 2023 with 24 Grand Slams and equalling Margaret Court's record for most singles slams won by any player in tennis history.

## India's record tally at Asian Games



(Photo courtesy: NDTV)

The 19th Asian Games was held from September 23 to October 8 in Hangzhou, east China's Zhejiang Province. India recorded their biggest medal haul in the history of the Asian Games, winning 107 medals at the continental showpiece event.

Not only that, but the number of gold medals at 29 was also the highest compared to any previous edition by nearly double the margin, with the previous best being 15, achieved in the 1982 Asian Games held in New Delhi. India finished fourth in the medals table behind powerhouses China, Japan and Korea.

## Satwik-Chirag scale the heights of Badminton



(Photo courtesy: News9live)

The Indian men's doubles duo of Satwik-siaraj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty continued their upward journey in world Badminton as they rewrote the history books. Whatever they won, they were the first Indian doubles pair to do that. However, they did certain things not achieved even by Singles players before them.

Satwik and Chirag became the first Indian to win the Badminton Asia Championships gold, the Indonesian Open and the gold medal at the Asian Games. They failed to reach the medal round of the World Badminton Championships but became the first Indian men's doubles pair to be ranked number one in the world. Their nomination for the Khel Ratna was the icing on the cake.

## Wrestlers on the street



(Photo courtesy: TV9)

For wrestling, it was a year marred by controversies. Top Indian male and female wrestlers Bajrang Punia and Vinesh Phogat hit the streets, demanding the removal of Brijbhushan Sharan Singh as the president of the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI).

They raised the issue of rampant misuse of power by the WFI president at the start of the year, and Sports Minister Anurag Thakur took cognizance of the problem and assured the aggrieved wrestlers of action. Seeing nothing happening, they hit the streets again and demanded justice from the court, which ordered the immediate filing of an FIR against Singh.

Once the Singh issue died down, it came to the selection criteria used by the WFI to select wrestlers for big events like the Olympics and the Asian Games. The practice won the medal in the previous edition and was first chosen to represent the country again.

However, it was changed to the medal winner facing a challenger in a one-off battle

According to FIFA, the tournament had almost two million spectators inside stadiums and two billion watching all over the world

to decide who goes through. The challenger would be chosen after national trials involving all national-level wrestlers in that weight category.

## Praggnanandhaa in Chess World Cup final



(Photo courtesy: Chess.com)

Rameshbabu Praggnanandhaa became the first Indian since Viswanathan Anand in 2002 to reach the Chess World Cup medal round. The teenager then beat Fabiano Caruana in the semi-final to set up a date with Magnus Carlsen for the final, where he lost out in the final rapid draw after playing two draws in the classical format.

However, the victory put him in the Candidate's Tournament 2024, where a win could give him a shot at the prestigious World Championships title against Ding Liren of China.

## The 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup



(Photo courtesy: HT)

It took place in Australia and New Zealand from July 20 to August 20, marking the first time for the tournament to be held in the southern hemisphere, to feature 32 teams, and to have more than one host nation.

Spain edged England 1-0 in the final, becoming the second country after Germany to have won both men's and women's World Cup titles.

According to FIFA, the tournament had almost two million spectators inside stadiums and two billion watching all over the world. This file photo taken on Aug. 20, 2023 shows team Spain celebrating during the awarding ceremony of the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup in Sydney, Australia.



# Understanding Ram and Ram Raj

Lord Ram, Mother Sita and Lakshman ji is inscribed, that page of the Constitution also talks about fundamental rights (kartavya).... the more we strengthen our resolve towards duties, the more the concept of a 'Ram Rajya' will become a reality."

A similar expression can be found in Valmiki Ramayana,

रामो रामो राम इति प्रजानामभवन् कथाः।  
रामभूतं जगद्भूदामे राज्यं प्रशासति॥

Translated as, while Rama ruled the kingdom, the talks of the Praja people centered round Rama, Rama and Rama. The world became Rama's world.

Tulsidas begins describing Ram Raj as following,

राम राज बैठे त्रैलोका। हर्षित भए गए सब सोका॥

Meaning, as Ram was crowned and his rein started, there no one in the three world (three lokas - pataal, the nether world, Prithvi, the earth, and swarga, the heavens) who was sad or worried, they were all happy.

Valmiki asserts that the entire nature was in harmony and balanced,



Ram Raj, the ever idealistic kingdom of justice and fairness, will have to translate in to Ram Kartavya (Image: BS)

नित्यपुष्पा नित्यफलास्तरवः स्कन्धविस्तृताः।  
कालवर्षी च पर्जन्यः सुखस्पर्शश्च मारुतः॥

The trees there were bearing flowers and fruits regularly, without any injury by pests and insects. The clouds were raining in time and the wind was delightful to the touch.

सर्वे लक्षणसम्पन्नाः सर्वे धर्मपरायणाः॥

All the people were endowed with excellent characteristics. All were engaged in virtue or in their own dharma.

One may have to invoke Bhagvadgita to explore the deeper meaning of Raj, as it is one of the three qualities of the mind (sattva, rajas, and tamas) that determines one's behavior.

सत्त्वं सुखे सञ्जयति रजः कर्मणि भारत।  
जानमावृत्य तु तमः प्रमादे सञ्जयत्युत ॥14.9॥

Meaning, Sattva binds one to material happiness; rajas conditions the soul toward actions; and tamas clouds wisdom and binds one to delusion.

The action oriented rajas is quite complex, and it takes quite a bit of efforts to figure out the complexity of rajas, thus, one should approach rajas with caution, lest it be explained inappropriately.

सत्त्वं सुखे सञ्जयति रजः कर्मणि भारत।  
जानमावृत्य तु तमः प्रमादे सञ्जयत्युत ॥14.9॥

Meaning, Sattva binds one to material happiness; rajas conditions the soul toward actions; and tamas clouds wisdom and binds one to delusion. Thus, it is the rajas characteristic that links the soul to action, referring to the integrated actions with heart and soul, that would reflect the thoughts actions and words, something Ram was so passion about.

Interestingly, on September 8, 2022, an act of Modi government made a serious impression on the country when the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, changed the name of Rajpath to Kartavya Path, saying, "A new era has begun in the form of Kartavya Path. 'Kingsway (Rajpath)', the symbol of colonialism, will be history and has been erased forever."

Thus, Ram Raj, the ever idealistic kingdom of justice and fairness, will have to translate to Ram Kartavya, so aptly appropriate for a personality that placed everything on the altar of the kartavya of a son, a brother, a husband, a father, and

above all a people's (praja) king.

PM Modi rightly, therefore, said the Rajpath was for the British Raj, to whom the people of India were subjugated masses. He said that Rajpath was also a symbol of slavery and its structure was also a symbol of slavery. Today its architecture has also changed and its spirit has also changed, PM Modi added.

Hopefully, the highly sophisticated art of Vastu that was developed in India as part of Ayurveda was integrated into this new architecture to not only shake off colonial slavery but cosmic slavery as well. It was surely a welcome step. However, it would be a more meaningful mission were it to begin making the entire array of symbols and systems of colonialism a history.

Kartavya seems to be the most appropriate way to take the ownership of one's duties. However, Rajpath could actually have been changed to Rampath, as Ram raj may become linguistically troublesome, if the raj were to be translated as a British king. Raj bhasha on the government portal may become kartavya bhasha, which may be a must to learn to speak for one's kartavya. Similarly, Raj kosh (treasury) may have to become the Kartavya Kosh, the Raj Bhavan may need to be referred as Kartava Bhavan.

Many terminologies may have to be examined and perhaps even changed to elicit their true meanings for modern society.

**Balram Singh** is a Professor and the President of the Institute of Advanced Sciences, Dartmouth, Massachusetts, researching Ayurveda, Yoga, Vedic education, and Vedic social and political traditions. He is also adjunct faculty at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi.



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# Sleep Tourism To Spiritual Destinations: Travel Trends of Contemporary Indian Travelers

As we look ahead, to the year 2024, the data analysis of Thomas Cook reveals tourism industry anticipates the following trend not only to persist but to evolve, shaping the preferences and choices of contemporary Indian travelers.

**Sleep Tourism and Wellness Retreats for Rejuvenation:** Young Indians are diverging significantly from the travel habits of previous generations, moving away from tightly scheduled sightseeing holidays to embrace more relaxed vacations. The current generation, burdened by work fatigue, seeks opportunities for rest and rejuvenation. Trends like sleep tourism, which go beyond uninterrupted sleep to include activities like yoga, swimming, and spa wellness therapy, are gaining widespread popularity. Consequently, accommodations offering soundproof rooms, sleep consultations, recorded sleep meditations, pillow menus, sleep kits, and concierge services are experiencing a surge in demand. Notable destina-



(Image courtesy: cultureandheritage.org)

tions for such experiences include Goa, Coorg, Mysore, Kodaikanal, Alleppey, and Puducherry. At the same time, more people are choosing wellness retreats for peace and well-being. This has led to a noticeable increase in yoga and meditation tourism in places like Rishikesh, Mysore, and Pondicherry, showing how people today prefer a holistic approach to travel

**Personalized and Curated Travel:** Indians increasingly seek personalized and tailor-made jour-

neys, gaining more control over their itineraries. The demand for fully customizable private holidays, especially among discerning travelers, is on the rise. This trend caters to those looking for premium, experience-led travel, with a focus on a leisurely exploration of a destination's history, culture, cuisine, and hidden gems.

**Hidden Gems and Offbeat Destinations:** The quest for unique and lesser-explored locales continues to gain momentum, with

travelers seeking authentic and offbeat experiences beyond conventional tourist destinations. Domestic destinations such as Meghalaya, Ziro, Ponnudi, Sandakphu, Gokarna, Halebidu, Patan, Varkala, Mandu, Tawang, Hampi, Jawai and many more will continue to pop up on travelers itineraries for more unconventional travel.

**Travel For Festivals:** Cultural celebrations and festivals around the world attract Indian travelers, seeking to immerse themselves in diverse traditions and celebrations.

**Food Tourism:** Culinary exploration remains a key trend, with travelers increasingly interested in discovering local cuisines, street food, and culinary traditions.

**Cruise Holidays:** Cruises continue to be a popular choice, offering a unique blend of luxury, entertainment, and the opportunity to explore multiple destinations in a single journey.

**Astro Tourism:** Catering to celestial enthusiasts, Astro Tour-

ism involves travel experiences centered around stargazing, celestial events, and astronomical wonders.

**Skip-Gen Travel (Grandparents Travelling With Their Grandchildren):** A growing trend where grandparents create memorable travel experiences with their grandchildren, fostering intergenerational bonds.

**Plan-Free Travel (Plan on the Move):** Emphasizing spontaneity and flexibility, plan-free travel allows for on-the-go decision-making, and adapting plans based on immediate preferences.

**Religious Tourism:** Spiritual journeys remain a focal point, with travelers seeking profound experiences at sacred destinations. Notable among these are the Vaishno Devi Temple in Jammu and Kashmir, Vrindavan in Uttar Pradesh, Rameshwaram in Tamil Nadu, Shirdi in Maharashtra, Hemkund Sahib in Uttarakhand, Jagannath Temple in Puri, Odisha, and the Golden Temple in Amritsar, Punjab.

## MELVIN DURAI'S HUMOR COLUMN

### Time To Make Your New Year's Resolutions

In just a few days, we'll be welcoming 2024. I'd like to take this opportunity to wish you, dear reader, a Happy New Year!

A new year is a good time to make some changes and produce a new you. Of course, I don't mean this literally. I don't want you to change so drastically that your friends don't recognize you. I don't want you to start the year, for example, as a loud-mouthed, out-of-shape man and end the year as a soft-spoken, fitness-obsessed woman.

Yes, it's possible to change that much within a year. But for most people, drastic changes are unrealistic and difficult to maintain.

I've made many resolutions over my lifetime and succeeded only a few times. Along the way, I've learned some important lessons that I'd like to share with you.

**1. Don't aim high—aim low.** Aiming high

is how most people fail. Some of them have never exercised in their lives, yet they somehow convince themselves that they're going to run for an hour a day, beginning on January 1. This usually results in a long line at the doctor's office on January 2.

First patient: "Ouch, my foot!"

Second patient: "Ouch, my back!"

Third patient: "Ouch, my credit card!"

Trust me, you are better off running for 10 minutes a day consistently than aiming for something longer and wishing you had Obamacare.

**2. Make a real commitment.** How do you do this? Well, think of what happens when two people commit to each other. They have a commitment ceremony, also known as a wedding. You don't have to have a ceremony, but you can write your resolutions down and announce them to your friends and

family at the New Year's party. This is also a good way to determine if your resolutions are realistic. If your friends say, "Good luck! You can do it!" you may want to aim lower.

**3. Don't make 10 resolutions—make a maximum of three.** It's easier to focus on a few changes at a time. Choose three resolutions that will make your life or someone else's better, and make sure you break them down into simple, specific actions you can take every day. Don't resolve to "read a book every month." Resolve to "read 10 pages every evening before turning the TV on." Don't resolve to "have a better relationship with my wife." Resolve to "get my butt off the couch and help my wife in the kitchen." Don't resolve to "be kind to strangers on the bus." Resolve to "take showers and use deodorant."

**4. If your resolutions fail, make new ones throughout the year.** You don't have to wait until the following New Year. You can do it at any time. You can do it on the first day of a new month, on your birthday, or whenever there's a new Trump indictment. Every morning is an opportunity to pursue a better you; every night is a chance to say, "Damn it, I'll try again tomorrow!"

**5. Don't give up.** Remember: it's better to make a little progress toward your goals than none at all. Consistency is important. If your resolution to run for 20 minutes a day crumbles, create another resolution right away to run for 15 minutes a day. If that fails, try 10 minutes a day. You will eventually be successful, even if you're running for just one minute a day—whenever the mouse peeks out from under your refrigerator.



(Image provided)

## Laughter is the Best Medicine



Time flies when you stay occupied. During day my dentist placed The Crown on my tooth, during night we watched The Crown on TV!

**Mahendra Shah** is an architect by education, entrepreneur by profession, artist and humorist, cartoonist and writer by hobby. He has been recording the plight of the immigrant Indians for the past many year in his cartoons. Hailing from Gujarat, he lives in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania



## **Mrs. Leelo Devi Whadwa**

(1939 -2024)

**Daughter of late Shri Tara Chand & Late Bhadri Devi Gandhi**

**Wife of late Shri Sant Ram Whadwa**

**Deceased on: January 01, 2024**

**To the world, you were one person, but to us, you were the world**

### **Mother to:**

Naveen & Shaku, Renu (w/o Late Parveen Whadwa)  
Goldy & Sheetal, Ranjan & Roozi, Rahul & Shika Whadwa

### **Grandmother to:**

Shilpa, Gaurav, Akashi, Esha, Rahat, Kusha, Shivam, Neil, Riya, Gurbani & Aavi

### **Godmother to:**

Satish & Ashma Galhotra, Prema & Nindi Vig, Vinny & Jyoti Shikarpuri, Sonu & Mandeep Sikka,  
Jaideep (Nonu) & Jasmeet Baweja, Gagandeep & Sonia Singh, Vishal & Bhawna Sharma, Jai & Sonia Vacchani

### **God Grand Mother**

- Aman, Ravneet, Keerath, Kavish.

### **Great Grand Mother**

- Krish, Nitia, Aarush, Kiaan, Viaan, Maneet, Aarzo

### **Kudum to:**

Renu Mehra w/o Late Vinod Mehra, Jagandar w/o of Late Mahindar Wadhwa, Ramesh & Poonam Kapur,  
Surinder & Nina Nagpal, Teerath & Meena Chugh, Eric & Totee Kumar.



**By Dr PremKumar Sharma**

(Astrologer, Palmist, Numerologist & Vastu Consultant)

**Panchkula India: +91-172- 256 2832, 257 2874**

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**ANNUAL PREDICTIONS: FOR THOSE BORN IN THIS WEEK (JANUARY 13-19, 2024)**

**January 13, 2024**

Governed by the number 4, you are also governed by the planet Uranus. You are firm in your words and deeds. An introvert by nature, you do not exhibit your feelings easily. In fact, you try to maintain a distance from those who talk too much. The coming year will see you lead a luxurious life. Financially, it will be a good year for you. But you will have to keep a control on your habit of finding faults with others. Try to overlook trivial faults in your friends and relatives. Those of you, who are to be married this year, can expect to achieve success and happiness in your married life. You tend to worry too much over small matters. Learn to relax and let small matters sort out themselves. This will help you to keep away from stress and strain. The months of April, August and January will be very significant.

**January 14, 2024**

You are governed by the number 5 and ruled by the planet Mercury. Your dynamic personality makes you the center of attraction in any social gathering. In the year ahead of you,

you will be able to impress the opposite sex with your style of dressing and also impress them with your conversation skills. In love matters, it will be a good year for you. Those of you, who are single, can expect to find your life partner. Those of you in your 40th year can expect to attain success. In fact, you will reach newer heights of excellence, and can expect to reach the top hierarchy, at work. You will have to be careful about respiratory infections. But care and precaution, will help you to overcome your health ailments, without much difficulty. Your lucky jewels are emerald, pearl and diamond and you should wear these to attain happiness and prosperity. The months of Jan, October and January will be very significant.

**January 15, 2024**

You are governed by the number 6 and the planet Venus. You are cooperative by nature and will go all out to maintain peace and harmony at work, as well as the domestic front. Since you do not like to annoy anyone, and are always adjusting to others demands, you have a lot of friends around you. Your keen power of observation and your sharp mind will bring success to you in your business pursuits, in the year ahead of you. You are a reserved person and do not easily show your emotions. This will be an added asset to you. Those of you,

who are single, can expect to find their life partner, in the year ahead of you. Also, marriage will bring you happiness as well as prosperity. You will be tempted to play high stakes in gambling, and you should be careful where to draw the line. The months of May, September and January will be very eventful.

**January 16, 2024**

You are dominated by the planet Neptune. You will enjoy your work and go to the depth of any project that you undertake. The domestic front will be full of happiness and peace. You will have well-wishers and family around you and they will be ever ready to help you, when and if the need arises. But you will have to be careful of not taking hasty decisions. Be calm, take your time, weigh the pros and cons, before jumping to any decision or conclusion. Use your sharp memory to your advantage. You will be drawn towards research and studies, in the coming year. You are born with intelligence and communication skills. Most of you do well as lawyers, because you have the ability to put forward your arguments. Honour, prestige and dignity, will be all yours, in the year ahead of you. The months of June, October and December will be very significant.

**January 17, 2024**

You are governed by the number 8

and the planet Saturn. Your creative ideas and hard work will bring success to you, in your professional front, in the year ahead of you. You can expect to see plans and projects, being fulfilled to perfection. You will not accept traditional customs and conventions, and keep away from those who have orthodox views in life. Although a believer of religion, you will not follow the routine track. Your pleasing personality and your deep knowledge of various issue, will make you the center of attraction at social gatherings. You are ambitious by nature and will always aim to reach the top. You desire to achieve the best and nothing but the best, for yourself in life. But you will be cold towards sentiments and emotions of others. You are not led away by tears or emotions. The months of June, September and February will be very important.

**January 18, 2024**

You are governed by the number 9 and dominated by the planet Mars. You are courageous by nature and can face any eventuality, which may come your way. Advance planning, coupled with enthusiasm and dynamism, will bring success to you from all corners. Travel will also form an important part of your career. Travel to distance places, is foreseen. This will be both, for pleasure as well as for work. The coming year, will be financially a good one, for most of

you. But you will have to control your obstinate nature. The ability to handle any difficult situation, with ease, comes naturally to you. Your sharp memory and a practical approach, will make those of you in business achieve success, in the year ahead of you. You will reach newer heights of excellence. At times you tend to get too obstinate and impetuous. The month of June, October, February will be eventful months.

**January 19, 2024**

Governed by the number 1 and the Sun, Generosity and courtesy, are two distinct qualities of your nature. In the coming year, you will leave no stone unturned, in fulfilling your responsibilities. Your honesty will bring you prestige and recognition in whatever you undertake, in the year ahead of you. You will be able to pursue your quest for knowledge. Reading and research will bring you pleasure and satisfaction. Your communication skills will draw the attention of your bosses and you will be able to impress them with your views and knowledge of various subjects and issues. Your lucky colours are shades of yellow, red and white, and you should keep these in mind, while buying clothes or painting your house. You will be able to do this to the satisfaction of your loved ones. The months of May, October and November will be very eventful.

**STARS FORETELL: JANUARY 13-19, 2024**

**ARIES (Mar 21-Apr 20)**



Loaned money will be returned sooner than expected. Your disinterest will be apparent at work and someone will not hesitate to say so. Instilling moral values in youngsters can become important at this juncture. A friendship shows all signs of turning into a budding romance. You will need to remain vigilant on the road this week. A lucrative property deal may become hard to ignore, so go right ahead. Not a favourable week for students as they may perform below par in a competition. The first day of this week will turn out to be positive, as luck turns for the better.  
Lucky Number : 5 Lucky Colour : Magenta

**TAURUS (Apr 21-May 20)**



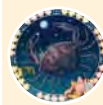
Those in marketing are likely to face some difficult clients this week. The family will be supportive, especially for those following a hectic schedule. A pleasant surprise on the romantic front cannot be ruled out for some. Travelling as a group to somewhere exciting is on the cards, but may prove fatiguing. Efforts are likely to bear fruit in the real estate market. Some of you can remain busy in completing a task given on the professional or academic front. Don't have anything to do with people you are not comfortable with. You manage to remain in shape by eating wisely. Money invested in a scheme may not give the expected returns.  
Lucky Number : 3 Lucky Colour : Yellow

**GEMINI (May 21-Jun 21)**



You may get introduced to someone new and expand your friends' circle. A child or family youngster may question your authority. Those in a relationship will have to do their bit to keep the bonds strong. A vacation is foreseen for some and promises much fun and relaxation. Those thinking of renovation may be forced to shelve the project for sometime. Your performance on the academic front will need improvement. A change in lifestyle will do a whale of a good to your health. You will have to be at your persuasive best to recover a loaned amount.  
Lucky Number : 18  
Lucky Colour : Light Blue

**CANCER (Jun 22-Jul 22)**



Homemakers are likely to exercise their initiative in bringing about a few changes. Lover may complain of your indifference, so handle the situation diplomatically. Travelling bug is likely to bite some, but leave may become a problem. If buying property is on your mind, you are likely to find something that suits your pocket. Those worried on the academic front will manage to take positive steps to realise their dreams. Selective eating will keep you fit as a fiddle. Those worried about their financial situation can rest easy. Don't pick up an argument at workplace as it can go against you.  
Lucky Number : 2  
Lucky Colour : Golden

**LEO (Jul 23-Aug 23)**



Keeping a positive outlook will help in spreading positivity at home. Your romantic relationship can experience rough weather. Those travelling long distance will find the journey comfortable. Good tenants will end the draught for some house owners looking to rent their premises. You are likely to succumb to the charms of someone you have only met once! Keeping in touch with the achievers will be a step in the right direction on the academic front. Health wise you are likely to remain perfectly fit and energetic. You are likely to get a chance to invest in a financially sound scheme. A tough situation on the family front may be faced and get you all worked up.  
Lucky Number : 4 Lucky Colour : Purple

**VIRGO (Aug 24-Sept 23)**



This is the time for you to review your career graph on the professional front. Lethargy and laid back attitude of spouse or a family member can annoy you. Those seeking love may get lucky and find somebody suitable. Positive feedback of a holiday destination may tempt you to go for a short vacation this week. Chances of property or wealth coming your way through inheritance cannot be ruled out. A favourable time is foreseen for those making efforts on the academic front. Appropriate diet and remaining active will find you in excellent health. Someone can take you for a ride on the monetary front.  
Lucky Number : 6 Lucky Colour : Green

**LIBRA (Sept 24-Oct 23)**



Family will love the new surroundings and help you in settling down fast. Lover may put an unrealistic demand on you; see what you can do best! Your indifferent attitude is likely to rub off on partner and make an outing colourless. Good wishes and blessings of well wishers will help you in achieving what you have set out for. You are likely to get favourably placed on the academic front. Steps taken to come back in shape are likely to prove most beneficial. You will be able to make good decisions on the financial front. Help from co-workers in a time consuming task will be forthcoming at work.  
Lucky Number : 8  
Lucky Colour : Dark Grey

**SCORPIO (Oct 24-Nov 22)**



You may find parents indifferent to your needs, but that may not be entirely true. Love life may take a nosedive as the relationship threatens to get spoilt. Some of you may have to proceed for an out-of-town official tour at short notice. A house or property is likely to give less than expected returns. Some of you will need to regain lost ground on the academic front by burning the midnight oil. Your helping hand to someone on the social front is likely to win you many brownie points. Getting a clear chit on the health front is likely to come as a big relief. Conserving money can become your prime concern. Conserving money can become your prime concern.  
Lucky Number : 1 Lucky Colour : Peach

**SAGITTARIUS (Nov 23-Dec 21)**



A perfect understanding of the spouse will help in gauging moods and preempting showdowns! Those travelling to a distant place will find the going smooth and comfortable. You will be able to motivate a family youngster to give his or her best in a competition. Thing that you had been dreading the most is over and now is the time to lead a stress-free life. Approaching deadlines can make you jittery and cause mental tension. Financial condition is set to improve for some as profits accrue. You are likely to play to the gallery and manage to impress those who matter on the professional front.  
Lucky Number : 22  
Lucky Colour : Peach

**CAPRICORN (Dec 22-Jan 21)**



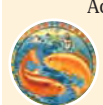
It is time you cleansed your system by eating less or fasting. A bad deal can get you stranded with items you have little use for. Your tendency to overspend on yourself needs to be checked. Efforts may be required to create a relaxed atmosphere at home. Love seekers are likely to hit pay dirt as they find someone who shares their interests. Those travelling should be careful on the road this week. A windfall can be expected for those disposing of property, but they will have to be careful while investing this money. A windfall can be expected for those disposing of property, but they will have to be careful while investing this money. Your creative side craves expression, so find time to do something about it.  
Lucky Number : 7 Lucky Colour : Pink

**AQUARIUS (Jan 22-Feb 19)**



Positive results of your hard work will be quite apparent on the health front. Paying off creditors can appear difficult, but you will manage somehow. A good deal is certain to come your way through your negotiating skills on the professional front. It is best to toe the line of a parent or family elder than adopt a confrontationalist attitude. Your love boat can be tossed around in rough seas, if you don't erase differences soon. Adventurous types need to be careful while experiencing a thrilling outdoor activity. Shifting to a new place is on the cards for those looking for a suitable accommodation. Extended family is likely to offer you full support and help you in achieving your aspirations.  
Lucky Number : 1 Lucky Colour : Red

**PISCES (Feb 20-Mar 20)**



Adhering to a good routine will help you in negating ill health. Following advice of someone close is likely to make your money grow. An invitation to some unique event is likely to warm the cockles of your heart. Someone close going abroad or out of town for a long duration can make you emotional. Romance is likely to blossom and help make life blissful. Those planning a journey must take the weather into account to remain safe. A new acquisition can distract you from something important. Reverses on the academic front will make you stronger and you will be able to achieve what you had set out for. Tips given by someone is likely to come in handy in a tricky situation.  
Lucky Number : 22 Lucky Colour : Dark Grey

HOPE  
HEALTH  
& HARMONYTheSouthAsianTimes.info  
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## YEARLY FORECAST 2024

## WISHING YOU ALL A VERY HAPPY &amp; PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR 2024

**ARIES (Mar 21-Apr 20)**

2024 is going to be an amazing year full of strength and good vibes. Challenges will give you the maturity and fresh insights you need to re-shape your plans for success and growth in all facets of your life. This year, you will start off bold and full of energy to tackle any task at hand. You are likely to get new opportunities that will be helpful for your overall growth and development. Some of you are likely to incline more towards spirituality. Regarding health, you will become stronger and conquer all the challenges easily. Notably, your reputation is poised for an upswing, potentially garnering societal recognition for your contributions. 2024 will improve your bond with your spouse or companion.

Lucky number: 1

Lucky Color: Yellow

Lucky Month: January, August, October

**TAURUS (Apr 21-May 20)**

A multifaceted journey in 2024 awaits across the realms of various perspectives. The year's onset hints at potential vulnerabilities in health, urging caution and mindfulness. Financially, a delicate balance emerges as income aligns with expenses, with the promise of gains continuing throughout the year despite initial financial intricacies. Professionally, you are set for a gratifying journey, with diligence paving the way for optimistic outcomes. However, familial and romantic spheres may encounter challenges rooted in the complexity of understanding loved ones. On a broader scale, diverse endeavors encourage diligent efforts, leading to a rise in social standing and an expanded social circle, fostering self-assurance.

Lucky number: 9

Lucky Color: Green

Lucky Month: April, September, December

**GEMINI (May 21-Jun 21)**

The stars foretell a promising commencement to your journey in the year 2024. The cosmos promises to weave a tapestry of opportunities and positive influences, setting the stage for a year marked by growth, harmony, and the fulfillment of your aspirations. Vigilance against ailments like stomach discomfort and chest infections becomes crucial during this delicate period. Embrace the potential windfall that global ties may bring, as strategic alliances and ventures beyond borders could prove to be instrumental in bolstering your financial portfolio. Refrain from being allured of shortcuts within your professional domain. Fostering an open communication and understanding within your family becomes paramount, creating a supportive foundation. To navigate the complexities of marital relationships, prudent communication is recommended throughout the journey of 2024.

Lucky number: 3

Lucky Color: Purple

Lucky Month: February, November

**CANCER (Jun 22-Jul 22)**

The stars foretell a harmonious beginning to the year for Cancerians. The cosmic energies will weave a tapestry of equilibrium between career aspirations and domestic responsibilities. It is imperative to maintain a vigilant stance when it comes to health-related matters. Prudent expense management will help you maintain your savings. Your steadfast commitment during peaks of pressure can lead to rewarding advancements and noteworthy achievements on the professional front. For those traversing the realms of education, the initial months hold the promise of triumph in competitive exams. Travel brings along with itself new experiences, cultural discoveries, and growth opportunities too. The prospect of contemplating marriage becomes a tangible reality in the air, promising significant milestones in your love life.

Lucky number: 2

Lucky Color: Orange

Lucky Month: January, March, September

**LEO (Jul 23-Aug 23)**

Get ready to bask in the celestial glow that awaits as the universe bestow its blessings upon you. It is a year to seize opportunities, harness your potential, and confidently steer your business ship towards new horizons. As the pendulum of financial fortune swings, the key lies in adapting, strategizing, and carving a path towards stability amid the undulating terrain of economic uncertainties. Nurturing good health practices becomes not just a choice but a necessity as you strive to maintain vigilance over your well-being. A focused approach to learning will be your guiding stars on the path to achieving your educational goals. On the love front, some of you may undergo both trials and triumphs, ultimately weaving a story of strengthened commitment and enduring affection. Distant landscapes or diverse cultures allure you to spread your wings and traverse the globe.

Lucky number: 5

Lucky Color: Golden

Lucky Month: March, July

**VIRGO (Aug 24-Sep 23)**

Virgo, the year 2024 invites you to tread wisely, embracing challenges with resilience and savoring the victories that await. Health demands careful attention. The potential for hurdles exists, yet so does the promise of resolution with disciplined, balanced living. Career aspirations see the light of accomplishment, especially in the initial months, where a positive spiritual perspective proves invaluable. Love, a realm of moderate results, urges emotional finesse to avoid strain. Professional conditions favor success, but gossip remains a pitfall. The year displays a promising start for the students. Family dynamics encounter initial vulnerabilities. On the financial front, planetary influences promise favorable outcomes, urging prudence for lasting monetary advancement. The stars encourage you to delve into the realms of introspection and connection with the divine, fostering a sense of spiritual well-being.

Lucky number: 6

Lucky Color: Brown

Lucky Month: June, September, December

**LIBRA (Sep 24-Oct 23)**

In 2024, Libra, the stars beckon you to embark on a journey marked by diligence, skill, and unwavering integrity. Neglecting your health may not be a good idea, but with a proactive and mindful approach, you can navigate the peaks and troughs, ensuring your well-being. Expect a gradual ascent in earnings, promising a more robust fiscal landscape, particularly in the first half of the year. Promising prospects are foreseen, both in terms of securing new job opportunities and making steady strides within your current profession. Contributions at home will play a pivotal role in fostering a special place within the hearts of your family members. Let dedication, sincerity, and thoughtful gestures be your guiding stars, creating a year filled with enduring romantic connections and the possibility of lasting unions.

Lucky number: 4

Lucky Color: Green

Lucky Month: February, April, May

**SCORPIO (Oct 24-Nov 22)**

A wave of positivity is poised to sweep through your life, infusing you with a magnetic charisma that will make you the center of attention. Your conduct will radiate a captivating energy, drawing people towards you like moths to a flame. Prioritize self-care and wellness, particularly in the initial months of the year. Whether it be investments, career advancements, or innovative ventures, the stars are conspiring to propel your financial trajectory forward. By dedicating yourself to your current job, you can anticipate positive outcomes and potential recognition for your efforts. Students need to navigate potential obstacles with determination and focus. Being patient on the love front will ensure that the foundations of marital harmony remain strong despite temporary challenges.

Lucky number: 9

Lucky Color: Red

Lucky Month: March, May, August

**SAGITTARIUS (Nov 23-Dec 21)**

2024 sets the stage for a year of dynamic energies and transformative experiences. A call to temper impulsive speech and resist hasty decisions, reminding you that mindful choices are key to maintaining equilibrium in both your professional and personal realms. Healthwise, a moderate state of well-being is forecasted, underscoring the importance of caution against potential infections. The first half of the year emerges as a beacon of balance, where careful financial navigation allows you to maintain equilibrium between income and expenses, ultimately contributing to your overall success. Opportunities for progress, coupled with potential benefits from the government sector, set the stage for a promising start. Students gearing up for competitive exams are likely to taste success. Love front may see highs and lows and needs to be carefully dealt with.

Lucky number: 5

Lucky Color: Pink

Lucky Month: May, July, December

**CAPRICORN (Dec 22-Jan 21)**

2024 is poised to bestow upon you a cascade of positive financial outcomes. A positive aura envelops your health, offering a resilient shield against the trials of life. Embrace the opportunities that demand a venture beyond your comfort zone as you may uncover significant success in your business endeavors. Prioritizing your own objectives and refraining from undue interference, you set the stage for unparalleled accomplishments. For students, a year of honing skills and staying committed to academic pursuits is foreseen. The initial chapters hold the key to enriching your romantic relationships, fostering a deeper connection with you partner. The stars emphasize the paramount importance of strengthening family bonds throughout the year.

Lucky number: 8

Lucky Color: Grey

Lucky Month: February, May, October

**AQUARIUS (Jan 22-Feb 19)**

In 2024, disciplined efforts will propel you to professional success and financial gains, setting a positive tone for marital harmony. Business pursuits will thrive, with improved luck and family relations, second quarter onwards. Romantic tensions early in the year will transform into positivity, fostering stronger emotional bonds. Career achievements are on the horizon, but students may face initial focus challenges, with exam success potential mid-year. Financial fluctuations require prudent expense management. Family life remains favorable, but marital relationships may fluctuate. Health outlook is optimistic, urging caution to safeguard well-being. Students need to enhance their focus to save themselves from making silly mistakes. Family life is likely to remain consistently favorable throughout the year, providing a stable foundation for personal growth and happiness.

Lucky number: 7 Lucky Color: Peach

Lucky Month: May, June

**PISCES (Feb 20-Mar 20)**

In 2024, Pisces individuals embark on a journey of promising opportunities to shape a year of significant growth. The early months, emphasize the significance of nurturing friendships and steering clear of impulsive decisions. Expect fluctuations in your well-being, with potential issues like eye problems or foot discomfort arising. Strategic budgeting and prudent financial management would be required throughout the year. Balancing the pursuit of financial growth with mindful spending ensures a secure foundation for both your economic well-being and familial harmony. Whether for leisure, education, or work, the year unfolds with the promise of broadening your perspective through travel. The outlook for your career is notably optimistic, with anticipated excellence in your job, earning positive regard from superiors. Ongoing challenges in family life can be sorted through open communication. Conflicts in relationships could escalate if not timely dealt with.

Lucky number: 6

Lucky Color: Yellow

Lucky Month: March, April, November

# New Year's Message

From **Sant Rajinder Singh Ji Maharaj**

January 1, 2024

I wish all of you a joyous holiday season and a Happy New Year. As we enter the new year, it is a good time to think about our most important goals. Many of us think about improving our physical health, our relationships, our education and career goals, and other activities in life. However, there is one goal in which, if we make improvements, it will provide benefits to all other areas of our life. Making progress in meditation enriches all endeavors relating to our body and mind. Yet, it also has an added benefit in that it helps us achieve our spiritual goals of life, which is to know our self as soul and realize God.



Thanksgiving Program 2023 in Chicago, USA (November 23-26, 2023)  
(Image courtesy: Sant Rajinder Singh Ji Maharaj/Facebook)

For this reason, the slogan for the new year is: Meditate more In 2024.

Medical research shows that meditation can help us physically by reducing stress-related illnesses. It can help our mind and intellect by making us more focused, concentrated, and productive whether in our studies or work or anything in which we engage. It can help us emotionally by connecting us with a source of godly love within us. By helping us become calm and peaceful, meditation improves our relationships. Yet most of all, it helps us spiritually.

Meditation on the inner Light and Sound opens up the gateway to journey into spiritual realms within. By doing so, we can achieve self-knowledge that our true self is our soul. As the soul connects with the Light

and Sound within, we can travel on the inner journey where our soul can attain union with the Divine. This leads to our achieving permanent peace, lasting happiness, bliss, and divine love.

As we face the outer challenges of life, meditation on the inner Light and Sound provides us an inner sanctuary of peace where we can go and be renewed and refreshed. The tranquility and joy we gain through meditation helps us deal with life's difficulties in a calmer, more balanced way. If we put into practice these four words, "Meditate more in 2024" we will find that the new year will bring us a happier year ahead.

May God bless each of you with permanent peace, unending joy, and ecstatic love.

Yours sincerely,  
RAJINDER SINGH

## ANUVRAT MOVEMENT

# "Nonviolence is the highest duty"

By **John Di Leonardo**

We're coming into a new year and that means you may be thinking about a New Year's resolution. Perhaps you're thinking about getting leaner or building more muscle. Maybe you'd like to be a little kinder or live a little greener. Perhaps you simply want to give more back to your community. By following just one simple ANUVRAT—or small vow—that of ahimsa—or nonviolence—you can accomplish all these resolutions simultaneously.

Leaving meat and dairy off your plate saves the lives of nearly 200 animals every year—every one of them denied a natural life and killed when they're still

babies. It also removes you from contributing to the staggering 51 percent or more of global greenhouse gas emissions that are caused by animal agriculture, according to a report published by the Worldwatch Institute, and from contributing to more than half of the water used in the United States today being wasted on animal agriculture. Since farmed animals produce 130 times more excrement than the human population, the run-off from farm waste not only wastes water but also contaminates our waterways.

Going vegan also puts you into a category that is one-ninth as likely to be obese as meat-eaters and has a cancer rate that is only 40 percent that of meat-eaters. Replacing meat and dairy with deli-



Acharya Tulsi Ji

cious plant-based alternatives also means giving up cholesterol—which is only found in animal-derived foods—and decreasing your risk for many other illnesses, including strokes, obesity, osteoporosis, arthritis, Alzheimer's, multiple allergies, diabetes, and food poisoning. NFL players like quarterback Cam Newton and world-record strongmen like Patrik Baboumian are vegan not only to help animals but to also improve performance. Check out "The Game Changers" on Netflix for an entire documentary about superstar athletes adopting a plant-based diet.

"Ahimsa Parmo Dharma" is a Sanskrit phrase popularized by Mahatma Gandhi. In short, it means, "Nonviolence is the highest duty." This year, I encourage each of us to take this ANUVRAT a little bit more seriously and better our health, the environment and the lives of animals by only consuming compassionate, animal-free food. With an infinite number of tasty and healthful replace-

ments for animal flesh, eggs and dairy available at nearly every grocery store and coffee shop, and Beyond Meat—which makes realistic plant-based meats out of vegetables like peas and beets—widely available food marts and even major restaurant chains like TGI Fridays, it has never been easier to live a kinder, healthier lifestyle. The organization Veganuary specializes in helping people make the transition for the new year and my organization Humane Long Island would be happy to help too. You can reach us at [www.humanelongisland.org](http://www.humanelongisland.org).



**John Di Leonardo** is the founding director of Humane Long Island. He was previously the Senior Manager of Grassroots Campaigns and Animals in Entertainment Campaigns for People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA). He has a Master's degree in Anthrozoology from Canisius College. He also earned a graduate certificate in Jain Studies from the International School of Jain Studies (ISJS) in India. John can be reached at [John@humanelongisland.org](mailto:John@humanelongisland.org).  
(Image provided)



(Image courtesy: progressive-charlestown.com)



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HAPPY NEW YEAR 2024

Wishing you a vibrant New Year filled with colorful moments and unforgettable stories



Heartiest Congratulations to

**Sankara Eye Foundation, USA**

For being Honored as

**The South Asian Times**

excellence in journalism

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