

The South Asian Times

excellence in journalism

Vol. 17 | No. 36 | Dec 28, 2024 - Jan 10, 2025

NEW YEAR SPECIAL

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Founder Mukund Padmanabhan (3rd from left) with three GKF Trustees: Amit Maitra, Lalit Bahl and Deepak Nayak

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Under the leadership of Mukund Padmanabhan, the New York-based Guru Krupa Foundation has been providing funds to charities and reputed institutions in India and the US since 2008 to help the needy, promote learning, and preserve heritage.

12 YEAR OF ELECTIONS

24 IN MEMORIAM 2024

57 2024 PERSON OF THE YEAR

70 INDIA CONFERENCE AT HARVARD



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 The South Asian Times-Organization
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Vol.17 | Issue 36 | Dec 28, 2024-Jan 10, 2025

New York Edition

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Donald Trump will reportedly host a victory rally a day before he is sworn in as president for the second time.
(Photo courtesy Donald J Trump/Facebook)

Stage set for Trump's return

Amid his MAGA call, the US President-elect returns to power at a time of dramatic changes in the international political, economic, environmental and technological landscape. Will he deliver good?

New York: US President-elect Donald Trump, to be officially sworn-in for his second term on January 20, has indicated a return to his "America First" foreign policy. Even at a time of flux in world affairs, this represents an extraordinary development.

As Trump prepares to assume office, his administration promises sweeping reforms in immigration, economic policies, and foreign relations. With ambitious plans like mass deportations, tariff hikes, and withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement, his second term looks like a step up from his first. One of Trump's most vocal commitments is his plan to overhaul immigration policies.

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DON'T MISS

Our special New Year pullout on Organization of the Year 2024

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Trump 'believes' in H-1B visas

New York: President-elect Donald Trump has declared that he is a "believer in H-1B" visas, quashing the opposition to the program for qualified professionals to work in the US that pitted the right-wing fringe against his advisers Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy. "It's a great program," he told the New York Post in a phone interview. "I've always liked the visas, I have always been in favor of the visas. That's why we have them."

"I have many H-1B visas on my properties. I've been a believer in H-1B. I have used it many times," he told the newspaper that is a part of the Rupert Murdoch-controlled News Corp.

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Gukesh, Manu among Khel Ratna awardees

New Delhi: World Chess champion Gukesh D and Paris Olympics and Paralympics medallists — Manu Bhaker (shooting), Harmanpreet Singh (hockey) and Praveen Kumar (para-athlete) — are to be conferred with Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award 2024 by President of India Droupadi Murmu at a specially organized function at Rashtrapati Bhavan on January 17.

Gukesh recently became the youngest-ever World Chess Champion after outclassing China's Ding Liren in the title battle in Singapore. Manu became the first Indian athlete to win twin medals in a single edition of the Games in Paris, following a double bronze in the 10 m air pistol and 10 m air pistol mixed team event.

On the other hand, Harmanpreet led India to their second successive bronze medal in men's hockey while Praveen bagged gold in the high jump T64 in the Paralympics. Apart from the Khel Ratna, the Sports Ministry also named a 32-athlete list for the Arjuna Awards for outstanding performance in Sports and Games 2024.



Recently crowned world chess champion D Gukesh and Paris Olympics double medallist shooter Manu Bhaker. (Photos courtesy: X@tatasteelchess, X@realmanubhaker)

The list includes Jyothi Yarraji, Annu Rani, Nitu, Saweety, Vantika Agrawal, Salima Tete, Abhishek, Sanjay, Jarmanpreet Singh, Sukhjeet Singh, Rakesh Kumar, Preeti Pal, Jeevanji Deepthi, Ajeet Singh, Sachin Sarjerao Khilari, Dharambir, Pranav Soorma, H Hokato Sema, Simran, Navdeep, Nitesh Kumar, Thulasimathi Murugesan, Nithya Sre Sumathy Sivan, Manisha Ramadass, Kapil Parmar, Mona Agarwal, Rubina Francis, Swapnil Suresh Kusale, Sarabjot Singh, Abhay Singh, Sajan Prakash and Aman.

Former cyclist Sucha Singh and former para-swimmer Murlikant Rajaram Petkar were awarded Arjuna Awards (Lifetime) for outstanding performance in Sports and Games. Subhash Rana (para-shooter), Deepali Deshpande (shooting) and Sandeep Sangwan (hockey) were named Dronacharya Award 2024 recipients.

India declares 2025 as year of defense reforms



The reforms would ensure India's security and sovereignty amidst challenges of the 21st century, said Defense Minister Rajnath Singh.
(Photo courtesy: X@rajnathsingh)

New Delhi: India has declared 2025 as the year of defense reforms and said that the focus will be to roll out integrated theater commands to boost tri-services synergy and ensure simpler and time-sensitive military procurement with a broader aim to transform the military into a technologically-advanced force.

The overall aim of the nine-point reforms planned by the defense ministry would be to ensure deeper collaboration among key stakeholders, break silos, eliminate inefficiencies, and optimise utilization of resources.

The reforms would lay the foundation for "unprecedented" advancements in defense preparedness and ensure India's security and sovereignty amid challenges of the 21st century, Defense Minister Rajnath Singh said.

The defense ministry's aim on theater commands assumes significance as it virtually indicated a resolve to unveil the ambitious reform measure in 2025. Under the theaterization model, the government seeks to integrate the capabilities of the Army, the Air Force, and the Navy and optimally utilise their resources for wars and operations.

As per the theaterization plan, each of the theatre commands will have units of the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force, and all of them will work as a single entity looking after security challenges in a specified geographical territory.

At present, the Army, Navy, and Air Force have separate commands. The decision on observing 2025 as the 'year of reforms' and the broad objectives under it were finalized at a high-level meeting chaired by Singh. It was attended by all the secretaries of the defense ministry.

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Presenting Organization of the Year 2024

Letter from the Publisher



Kamlesh C. Mehta
Chairman & Publisher

As every year, we start with an incredibly special edition by featuring The South Asian Times Person/Organization of the Year, who have transformed thousands of lives with their generous philanthropy, guidance and by sharing their knowledge, understanding and wisdom.

This year, we are delighted to announce our prestigious annual honor, "The South Asian Times -

Organization of the Year 2024" to be bestowed on Guru Krupa Foundation (GKF) based on Long Island, New York.

GFK is a prominent philanthropic foundation. It has silently helped scores of institutions and charities for almost two decades and continues to support many. It has transformed many lives through its grants and support programs in partnership with well-established organizations.

Mr Mukund Padmanabhan founded GFK in 2008 with a mission to help those less fortunate, support the acquisition of knowledge, and preserve the heritage and knowledge that has already been acquired.

In recent years, GKF has given substantial grants to charities and institutions that preserve and promote Vedic wisdom, Education, Elderly Homes and several enhancement programs.

Mr Parveen Chopra, who has handled all our Person of the Year specials since 2008, and has once again beautifully crafted the 'Organization of the Year 2024' feature, even though he is overwhelmed with his own passion project, ALotusInTheMud.com.

Our New Year and Person of the

Year special issues, print and 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 to 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

Dear Friends,

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

Trust you, and your loved ones are well.

As I welcome 2025 and look back at the year gone by, I see 2024 as a period of notable achievements and some irreparable losses in former prime minister Dr Manmohan Singh, the 'architect of India's economic reforms' and Ratan Tata, an iconic industrialist and philanthropist.

World mourned the loss of legendary musician Zakir Hussain, who exalted tabla to a global status and blurred boundaries, and former US President and Nobel Peace Prize winner Jimmy Carter, who spent decades working in developing nations on efforts to restore human rights and build democratic institutions.

The political developments in

2024 took centerstage, especially the majestic return of Donald Trump as the 47th President of the United States and the unstoppable Narendra Modi becoming Prime Minister of India for the record third time.

With this comes hope that Trump and Modi can play the role of global peacemakers in 2025 to end the long-running Russia-Ukraine war and bring stability to the Middle-East region.

From Manu Bhaker's historic twin bronze medals and Neeraj Chopra's silver in javelin throw at the Paris Olympics to Gukesh Dommaraju becoming the youngest-ever classical World Chess Champion, 2024 saw India's rise as a sporting nation.

The cricket team was not far behind as under Rohit Sharma's leadership, the men's team clinched the T20 World Cup 2024 with a brilliant victory against South Africa in the final.

Amid all the positivity around, the Team @ The South Asian Times is proud to present its annual New Year Special issue. Thank you so much for your continued participation and support, it means a lot to us.

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

<p>2024</p>	<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>

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New York City welcomes 2025 with Ball Drop moment



(Photo courtesy: Screengrab from live video posted by TimesSquareNYC/X)

The Times Square ball drop has been a tradition since 1907 when the original ball of wood and iron made its way down the pole. Now watched by millions around the world, the tradition is still going strong.

Times Square has been the site of New Year's celebrations in New York since 1904, the year the Square got its name when The New York Times moved into a building there. The paper's owner, Adolph Ochs, held a celebration on New Year's Eve that year to commemorate the opening of the paper's new headquarters.

Two years into the new tradition, the city banned the fireworks display, prompting the ball drop to take its place.

The New Year's celebrations took place across the world as people enthusiastically marked the arrival of 2025. The transi-

tion to 2025 unfurled in a striking wave of celebrations as each region marks the occasion. The celebration is testament of global

unity, as from small islands in the Pacific to energetic and busy cities, all welcomed the New Year with passion and thrill.

Mayor Adams announces 'Founded by NYC' - year-long celebration to mark city's 400th anniversary

Celebrations, concerts, and free events to take place through 2025.

Rich cultural history of Lenape People and Indigenous Community will be prominently highlighted in "Founded By NYC" campaign.

Launched in partnership with NYC Tourism + Conventions, which helped bring nearly 65 M visitors to NYC in 2024, second highest number of visitors in city history.

Campaign supported by Tony Award-Winning Broadway Musical "Hamilton".

New York City Mayor Eric Adams on December 31, 2024, announced, "Founded By NYC," a year-long inclusive, comprehensive celebration of the 400th anniversary of New York City. In partnership with NYC Tourism + Conventions, Founded By NYC will celebrate how New York City has made history, and continues to do so — highlighting the achieve-

ments driven by the creativity and resilience of the five boroughs and its people, including the perspectives of marginalized audiences like those of the Indigenous community, women, and people of color.

"For four centuries, history has happened here. And in 2025, through our 'Founded By NYC' campaign, we will celebrate all those who came here from around the world over those 400 years to build our great city — the New Yorkers whose vibrant culture, innovation, and abilities continue to make us the envy of the world today — as well as all we continue to do every day to build a future that is safer and more affordable," said Mayor Adams. "But we know that our city's history has not been without its challenges, and that the story of New York City began a millennia ago, long before the Dutch arrived, when this land was inhabited by the Lenape people.

To properly recognize our city's complex, diverse, and unparalleled history, we must also acknowledge the painful parts of its origin, and ensure we are celebrating the Lenape's rich contributions to our city as much as anyone else's. The story of New York City is one of perseverance and

triumph, and, in 2025, we will show the world why we are the greatest city in the world."

Organizations are encouraged to visit website www.nyc2025.com to submit events to be added to the Founded By NYC celebration. Events should be in person, encourage visitors to explore everything the five boroughs has to offer during this milestone year, and should highlight or commemorate one or more of the following themes: historical significance, cultural impact, innovation and creativity, authentic storytelling, or sustainability and legacy.

Founded By NYC brings together organizations across the city, including the Lenape Center, The Broadway League, the Museum of the City of New York, Times Square Alliance, multiple Business Improvement Districts, and all city agencies. All year, New York City's 400th anniversary will be incorporated into major city events in the worlds of art, film, music, and more, including Gracie Mansion's art installations, New York City Department of Parks & Recreation free summer movies featuring notable films set in the five boroughs, the 47th Annual Museum Mile Festival, New York Philharmonic free concerts featuring New York City-based composers and performances of iconic New York City songs, performances by Broadway stars, and the lar-



(Photo courtesy: NYCMayorsoffice/Flickr)

NYC Health+Hospitals/Kings County welcomes first newborns of 2025

The City's public health care system's first babies — twins — were born at NYC Health + Hospitals/Kings County on January 1, 2025 just after midnight. The twins have not been named yet. The first baby girl was born at 12:01AM, weighing 6 lbs., 13.9 oz, and the second baby girl was born at 12:02AM, weighing 5 lbs., 15.4 oz. The twins were born to parents Sheneece Crumbie and Jordan Tomlinson. The twins are the Crown Heights' couple third and fourth child.

The City's public health system delivers thousands of babies every year. The City's public health sys-



The twin baby girls were born to parents Sheneece Crumbie and Jordan Tomlinson. (Photo provided by NYC Health+Hospitals)

tem's 11 hospitals provide expert prenatal care, labor and delivery services, family planning, comprehensive gynecology, women's health and primary care outpatient medical support for women at every stage of life.

10 injured in mass shooting outside nightclub in Queens

At least 10 people were injured in a shooting outside a nightclub in Queens on Wednesday night, according to the New York City Police Department, the New York Post reported on Thursday.

The incident occurred near the Amazura nightclub in Jamaica, a neighborhood in New York City, just before 11:20 pm.

Law enforcement reported that the victims were taken to nearby hospitals, including Long Island Jewish Hospital and Cohen's Children Medical Center.

None of the victims are in critical condition and all are expected to survive, according to the NYPD, the New York Post reported.

Footage shared on Citizen App showed a large police and ambulance presence outside the club. Amazura, known for its spacious interior that can accommodate up to 4,000 people, frequently hosts DJs and live events.

The incident of mass shooting in New York City follows the attack in New Orleans that claimed 15 lives.

Earlier, US President Joe Biden said that law enforcement is investigating any possible connection between the New Orleans 'terror' attack and the Tesla Cybertruck explosion outside the Trump International Hotel in Las Vegas.

gest-ever New York City Department of Transportation Summer Streets with 400 blocks of free events citywide. Dates and times for events will be announced in the coming months. New York City's 400th anniversary themes will be featured in additional events, parades, festivals, institutions, and celebrations across the city with announcements to come throughout the year.

Throughout planning for New York City's 400th anniversary, the Mayor's Office has partnered with the Lenape Center to uplift the voices of the Lenape community. Earlier this year, Mayor Adams proclaimed November 20 "Lenape Heritage Day" in a ceremony at Gracie Mansion. This announcement came one year after Mayor Adams hosted the first-ever mayoral reception celebrating

Native American and Indigenous heritage at Gracie Mansion, to ensure the past contributions and painful experiences of the Lenape people and other Indigenous communities are not lost to history.

"New York City has long been a beacon of inspiration and ingenuity, and the 'Founded By NYC' campaign captures that spirit," said NYC Tourism + Conventions President and CEO Julie Coker. "Our year-long commemoration invites visitors and locals alike to explore the rich history, cultural diversity, and innovation that define New York City. From the Lenape people's legacy to the communities that have shaped the five boroughs, this campaign honors our shared past while looking to the future. We look forward to welcoming the world to celebrate 400 years of New York City magic."

Stage set for Trump's return

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Additionally, Trump has vowed to end birthright citizenship, a principle enshrined in the US Constitution, though achieving this would require significant legal and legislative hurdles.

On the global front, Trump has claimed that he will be able to end Russia's war against Ukraine within 24 hours of assuming office. Throughout his election campaign, he has vowed to end war in West Asia. He has also announced that he will slap increased tariffs on foreign goods entering the US.

Trump also suggested targeting Mexico and Canada with tariffs, warning of a 25 per cent levy if Mexico fails to address cross-border crime and drug trafficking. He returns to power at a time of dramatic changes in the international political, economic, environmental and technological landscape. There are two wars underway, in Europe and West Asia, and great power competition has returned as a feature of the international system in more complex ways than it existed during the Cold War.

The president-elect will hold what is being dubbed a "victory rally" at Capital One Arena on January 19, according to an announcement from his inauguration committee. CBS News first reported on the planned rally.

Trump will be sworn in at the Capitol, and there will be multiple events throughout the day to mark the beginning of his second term. The president-elect has not held a rally in the District of Columbia since he delivered a speech on the Ellipse on January 6, 2021, which preceded a violent attack on the Capitol by supporters attempting

to stop the certification of the 2020 election results.

In his latest remark, Trump said that "the USA is breaking down" and has blamed the "weak, ineffective, and virtually non-existent leadership" for the nation's downfall. The president-elect's fiery statement slamming the US security came hours after the deadly New Orleans car attack, although he did specifically mention the incident in his post.

Trump's statement came following a series of violent incidents in the United States, including the New Orleans attack and the Tesla Cybertruck explosion outside the Trump International Hotel in Las Vegas, Nevada, which resulted in the death of the driver. In the New Orleans attack, at least 15 people died when suspected terrorist Shamsud-Din Jabbar plowed a pickup truck bearing an ISIS flag into New Year's Eve revelers on Bourbon Street. He was eventually shot dead by cops.

Trump 'believes' in H-1B visas

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Trump has supported reforming the immigration system to make it merit-based, adopting a points system like Canada or Australia that gives weight to academic and employable qualifications. He has said that he wanted foreign students graduating from US universities to get green cards with their diplomas.

The differences over H1-B visas and the immigration of highly qualified persons boiled over among Trump's loyalists after he appointed Sriram Krishnan, an Indian immigrant, as his artificial intelligence adviser.

Indians are by far the biggest

recipients of H-1B visas, getting 72.3 per cent of them last year. While the opposition to Indians coming in on H-1B visas and as immigrants on professional visas has taken the headlines, there has always been opposition to them verging on racism from the Left in the Democratic Party on the argument that they depress wages for US-born citizens and take their jobs.

India declares 2025 as year of defense reforms

<< CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

One of the nine points listed by the ministry following the deliberations was to take initiative to instil a "sense of pride" in Indian culture and ideas, fostering confidence in achieving global standards through indigenous capabilities, while imbibing best practices from modern militaries that suit the nation's conditions.

"The year of reforms will be a momentous step in the modernisation journey of the armed forces," Singh said. According to the defense ministry, the focus in 2025 will also be on new domains such as cyber and space and emerging technologies like artificial intelligence, machine learning, hypersonics, and robotics. The reforms would aim at transforming the armed forces into a technologically advanced combat-ready force capable of multi-domain integrated operations, the ministry added.

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India becomes 4th nation to ace docking technology



The majestic PSLV-C60 was launched with two SpaDeX satellites and 24 other innovative payloads. (Photo courtesy: X@isro)

New Delhi: The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has successfully launched the SpaDeX mission, achieving a historic space docking feat. India is now the fourth country, after the US, Russia, and China, to master the docking technology. The Space Docking Experiment (SpaDeX) mission lifted off aboard the PSLV-C60 rocket from Sriharikota on December 30, 2024. SpaDeX is a pioneering mission to establish India's capability in orbital docking, a key technology for future human spaceflight and satellite servicing missions, ISRO said.

The PSLV (Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle) lifted off with two small spacecraft — SDX01, the Chaser, and SDX02, the Target — weighing about 220 kg each. The satellites merged or joined for docking in a low-Earth circular orbit.

The Bharatiya Docking System includes a docking mechanism, a suite of four rendezvous and docking sensors, power transfer technology, indigenous novel autonomous ren-

dezvous and docking strategy, and an inter-satellite communication link (ISL) for autonomous communication between spacecraft, incorporated with inbuilt intelligence to know the states of the other spacecraft, among others.

Mastering the space docking technology may not only propel India into the elite club of spacefaring nations. It is also key for India's impending space missions including the Moon mission, setting up the Indian space station, and lunar missions like Chandrayaan-4 without the support of GNSS from Earth.

According to ISRO, it will also demonstrate the transfer of electric power between the docked spacecraft, which is essential for future applications such as in-space robotics -- composite spacecraft control, and payload operations after undocking. SpaDeX will also use PSLV's fourth stage, POEM-4, for experiments. The stage also carries 24 payloads from academic institutions and startups.

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World welcomes 2025 with stunning lights and fireworks

As the clock struck midnight across the globe, cities from London to Dubai illuminated the skies with stunning fireworks and light displays, welcoming 2025. Crowds gathered in major landmarks, celebrating the New Year with joy and excitement.



In Sydney, fireworks blasted off the Harbour Bridge and across the bay. More than a million Australians and others gathered at iconic Sydney Harbour for the celebration. British pop star Robbie Williams led a singalong with the crowd. (Photo courtesy: X@cityofsydney)



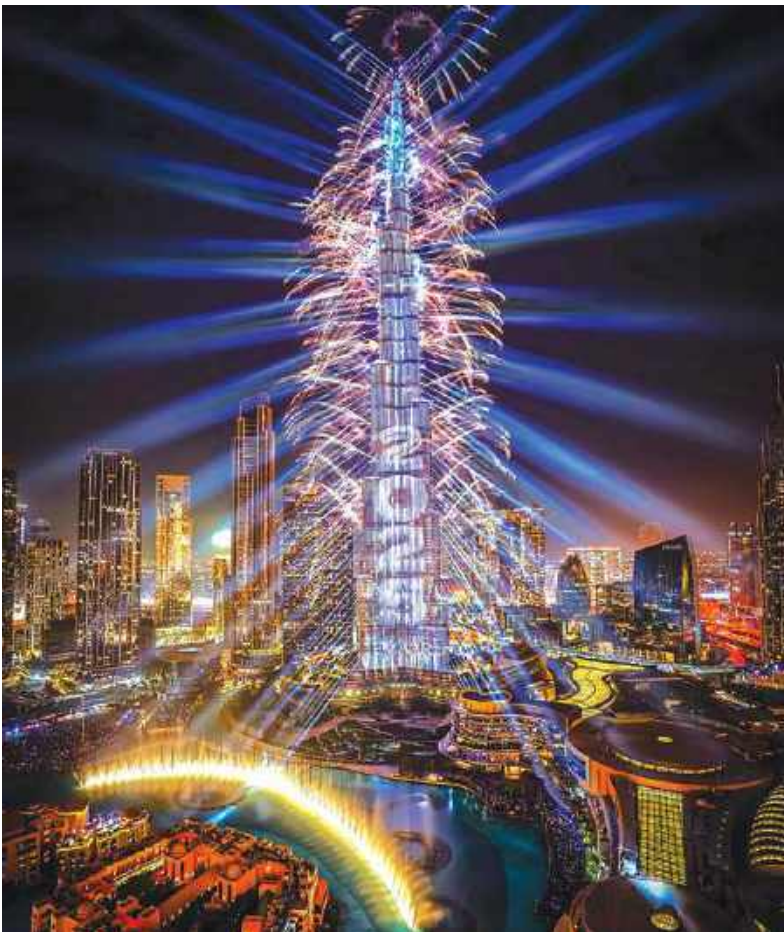
New Year fireworks lit up the sky around the London Eye and Thames river. (Photo courtesy: X@MayorofLondon)



Londoners out on the streets welcoming New Year. (Photo courtesy: X@MayorofLondon)



Paris rang in the New Year with a remarkable light display and fireworks show at Eiffel Tower. (Photo courtesy: X@JohnCremeanUSA)



In Dubai, thousands attended a fireworks show at the Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest skyscraper. A spectacular display of lights and fireworks were also seen at Burj Al Arab, Dubai's most iconic hotel and a global icon of Arabian luxury. (Photos courtesy: @DXBMediaOffice)

Happy New Year

May the new year be filled with joy, laughter, and amazing celebrations. We look forward to making 2025 a year of extraordinary moments...



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Manmohan Singh: Not accidental but a prime minister of mettle

MANMOHAN SINGH
September 26, 1932 – December 26, 2024



(Photo courtesy: Flickr)

One of the most qualified leaders in a country where finding enough educated politicians is still some task, he belonged to a different league. But he remained a 'loner' in Indian politics.

FM Manmohan over PM Manmohan? Not exactly

People often put Singh, the finance minister, on a higher pedestal than Singh, the prime minister. His act of liberalizing the Indian economy, which virtually gave the country a fresh lease of life for the second time after the political independence of 1947, will remain a golden moment.

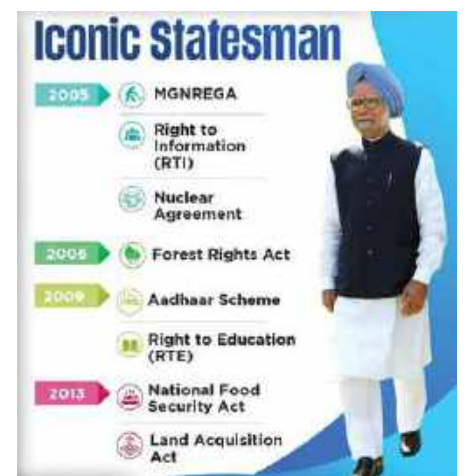
While liberalization was the need of the hour as the economic model that India had pursued in the first four years after independence had pushed it to the brink, Singh, under the patronage of his political boss PV Narasimha Rao, had taken the right decision at the right time. His decisive move earned him the name of a relentless reformer.

But it doesn't mean that Singh was less successful as the prime minister. History shows that there are leaders who landed in the PM's hot seat by chance and amid chaos and it would be dis-

respectful to call Singh the only 'accidental prime minister'. As an erudite man with experience who was no newcomer to governance, Singh was among a few men who Sonia Gandhi could have picked for the top job after she refused to become the PM herself in 2004.

After he became the PM, pipping stalwarts like Pranab Mukherjee, Singh did a good job, particularly in his first stint from 2004 and 2009, and got the reward of a renewed mandate. Irrespective of what critics allege about Singh surrendering the prestige of the prime minister's office before the Gandhi family, the power center of the Congress party, the former PM did exhibit that he could be firm on his decisions.

One such example was going ahead with the Civil Nuclear Agreement with the United States even by risking his government's survival since the Left pulled out. Singh was particularly thoughtful about India's foreign policy and made the country's development a key foundation to shape external affairs. While New Delhi under PM Narendra Modi has improved its ties with the Gulf nations, it was Singh who had launched the "Look West" Policy to improve ties with those countries.



(Graphic courtesy: INC India)

Dr Singh's flexible economic policies

Manmohan Singh also showed that he could be flexible with economic policies. While his liberalization in the early 1990s was more about inviting the market economy, he pursued a more social agenda as the PM a decade later. His government enacted the game-changing Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, providing a safety net to millions.

Dr Singh's second term was less memorable, thanks to endless charges of corruption. The man himself was always clean and respected even though he never was a charismatic superman like some of the other Indian prime ministers. But as the late leader predicted, history would be kinder to him and the obituaries suggest that he was right.

Leaders remember Singh as a 'true statesman', 'visionary'



PM Narendra Modi pays his last respects to Manmohan Singh. (Photo courtesy: X@narendramodi)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi

"India mourns the loss of one of its most distinguished leaders, Dr Manmohan Singh Ji. Rising from humble origins, he rose to become a respected economist. He served in various government positions as well, including as Finance Minister, leaving a strong imprint on our economic policy over the years... His service to India will always be cherished."

US President Joe Biden

The unprecedented level of cooperation between the United States and India today would not have

been possible without the Prime Minister's strategic vision and political courage. From forging the US-India Civil Nuclear Agreement to helping launch the first Quad between Indo-Pacific partners, he charted path-breaking progress that will continue to strengthen our nations—and the world—for generations to come. He was a true statesman. A dedicated public servant. And above all, he was a kind and humble person.

US Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi

"I mourn the loss of former Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh who played a key role in both modernizing India's economy and strengthening ties with the United States. His vision for a better India and a better world will continue."

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau

"Manmohan Singh's passing is a loss for India and the world. As one



Russian President Vladimir Putin met then PM Manmohan Singh in New Delhi on December 24, 2012. (Photo courtesy: Wikimedia Commons)

of its longest-serving leaders, he transformed the country's economy, lifted millions out of poverty, and built strong bridges with the world — including Canada."

Russian President Vladimir Putin

"An outstanding statesman. (He had) accomplished a lot in promoting India's economic development and asserting its interests on the world stage... I had the occasion of talking with this remarkable man several times. We will cherish the memory of him."

Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva

"We were contemporaries in government in the first decade of the 21st century and worked together to strengthen relations between our countries and build a fairer world. Singh was involved in the creation of IBSA, bringing together Brazil, South Africa, and India, and in the founding of BRICS."

The architect of Indo-US nuclear deal



Dr Manmohan Singh with then US President George W. Bush in New Delhi on March 2, 2006. (Photo courtesy: PIB)



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Śri Mahā Vallabha Ganapati Devasthānam, NY



क्षणं प्रतिक्षणं यन्नवं नवं, तच्च सुन्दरं सच्च तच्छिवम् ।
वर्षनूतनं ते शुभं मुदं, उत्तरोत्तरं भवतु सिद्धिदं ॥

*kshanam pratikshanam yannavam navam, tacca sundaram sacca tacchivam |
varshanutanam te śubham mudam, uttarottaram bhavatu siddhidam ||*

That which is ever new and fresh, that alone is good, real and beautiful.
May this New Year bring us greater goodness, happiness and success.

**As the New Year renews all the happiness and good tidings,
hope the joyful spirit keeps glowing in our hearts forever.**

**Wish everyone a happy, healthy, peaceful and
a prosperous NEW YEAR 2025**

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Year of global elections

2024 was the year of the elections as more than 60 countries, apart from the world's biggest democracies the US and India, cast their ballots and several of those voted against the incumbents, including in the UK

New Delhi: From Pakistan to Sri Lanka, from the UK to Japan and France, the year gone by was certainly the year of the elections where several countries voted against the incumbents. Here is a throwback of key elections from around the world.

The UK saw a change in government. The Labour Party won, ending the 14-year rule of the Conservative Party. It was a stunning comeback for the Labour Party, which saw its worst electoral defeat in over 80 years. The man behind the win was Keir Starmer, now the UK's Prime Minister.

The elections were held on July 4. The Labour party secured over 400 of the 650 parliamentary seats, their largest majority in decades. Rishi Sunak apologized to the nation following the Tory's defeat, saying he heard voters' "anger" at his government.

"To the country I would like to say first and foremost, I am sorry.



The Conservative Party, led by Rishi Sunak, suffered its worst election defeat. (Photo courtesy: X@RishiSunak)

I have given this job my all but you have sent a clear signal that the government of the UK must change, and yours is the judge-

ment that matters. I have heard your anger, your disappointment, and I take responsibility for this loss," Sunak emphasised.



Vladimir Putin claimed his fifth term in office. (Photo courtesy: X@KremlinRussia_E)

Russia

Amid war, Russia too held its presidential election. The country insists it's a democracy but the results are foreseeable. In March, Vladimir Putin claimed his fifth term in office. Another presidency which will last six years means he will remain in office until 2030.

Japan

Japan's Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba called for snap polls this

October. It shook up politics in the country as the ruling Liberal Democratic Party – which governed the country for most of the post-World War II era – and its coalition partner, Komeito, lost its majority in the parliament.

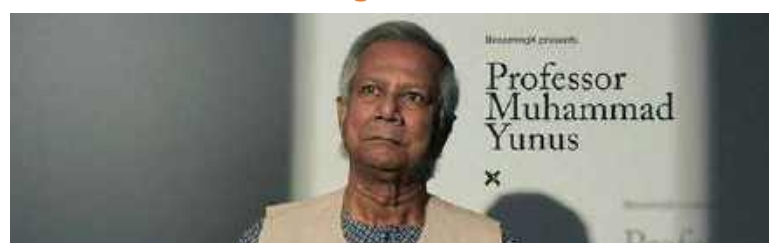
France

France held the first round of snap polls on June 30 and second round on July 7 to elect all 577 members of the National Assembly. Presi-

dent Emmanuel Macron dissolved the Assembly after significant losses for his coalition in the European Parliament elections. The elections resulted in a hung parliament, with the National Rally securing the most seats but failing to achieve a majority. Prime Minister Michel Barnier led government collapsed early in December in a confidence vote over his cost-cutting budget. Macron named Francois Bayrou as Prime Minister in December.

South Africa

General elections were held in South Africa on May 29 to elect a new National Assembly as well as the provincial legislature in each of the nine provinces. The African National Congress failed to win a majority of National Assembly seats for the first time since the end of apartheid. On June 14, the ANC, the DA, the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and the Patriotic Alliance (PA), agreed to form a national unity government, with Cyril Ramaphosa being re-elected President of South Africa.



Bangladeshi interim government's Chief Advisor Muhammad Yunus. (Photo courtesy: X@Yunus_Centre)

Bangladesh

Parliamentary elections were held in Bangladesh on January 7. The elections for the 350-member Jatiya Sangsad faced criticism over fairness. The ruling Awami League (AL), led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, secured a fourth consecutive term, winning 224 of the 300 contested seats. However, the

election results were boycotted by major opposition parties, including the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). The charge against the government of suppressing opposition voices and creating an uneven playing field.

In the aftermath of the election, Bangladesh saw widespread pro-

tests amid criticism from global leaders. A students' movement against job reservations snowballed into a mass uprising in July and August 2024 forcing Sheikh Hasina to resign. An interim government headed by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus as the Chief Advisor was established.

Sri Lanka

The Presidential elections were held in Sri Lanka on September 21. Anura Kumara Dissanayake of the National People's Power (NPP) alliance defeated his rivals to secure the presidency.

Dissanayake, 55, a Marxist member of Parliament from Colombo representing Marxist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), defeated prominent names including incumbent President Ranil Wickremesing-

he, who finished third with just 17 percent of the votes and Namal Rajapaksa, son of former President Mahinda Rajapaksa, who managed less than 3 percent of votes in the election.

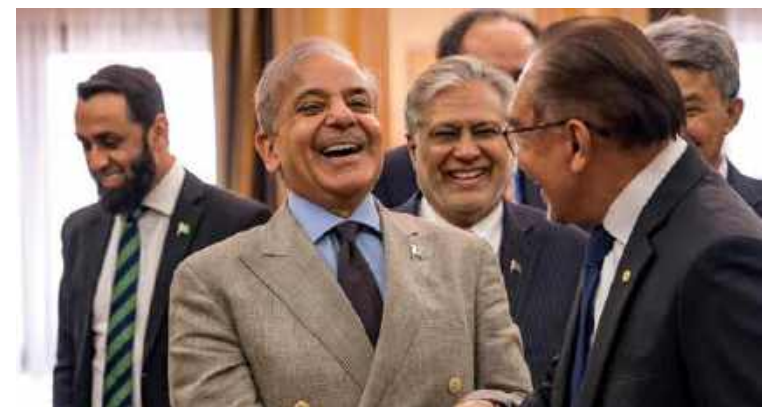
Dissanayake's victory was a significant development in the politics of Sri Lanka – the nation grappling in the aftermath of the



Anura Kumara Dissanayake of the National People's Power (NPP) alliance. (Photo courtesy: X@anuradisanayake)

mass protests that ousted Gotabaya Rajapaksa in 2022. Sri Lankan people clearly voted out the incumbent reflecting the anger in the country. Two months after the Presidential elections, parliamentary elections were conducted in Sri Lanka on November 14. The NPP secured a historic landslide, winning 159 out of 225 seats.

Pakistan



Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. (Photo courtesy: X@CMShehbaz)

Pakistan held elections in February this year. However, it wasn't until a month later that it decided on a prime minister. There was talk that Nawaz Sharif would make a comeback. However, that changed after the PMN-L won fewer seats than expected.

Elections were held to the National Assembly on February 8. Polling was held after the arrest of former Prime Minister Imran Khan and banning of his party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). Since the PTI was banned, many of its candidates ran as independents, securing over 100 seats and becoming the largest single group in the assembly.

However, the PTI independents lacked the mandatory coalition to form a government. The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), led by former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, emerged as the largest formal party with 75 seats, followed by the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) with 54 seats. A coalition government was subsequently formed by the PML-N and PPP, along with smaller parties, under Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

Economic instability continues to grip Pakistan. With Imran Khan wielding influence from behind bars, the threat of a political upheaval looms large.



Here comes Trump again

Criminal convictions, assassination attempts and a change in political opponent couldn't stop Republican Donald Trump from winning the 2024 US election with a thumping majority to become 47th President on January 20.

continue to wage this fight in the voting booth, in the courts, and the public square".

World leaders congratulate Trump

Several world leaders from around the world, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, congratulated Trump following his victory in the US presidential election, lauding the US leader's "historic" achievement.

PM Modi highlighted that his spectacular and resounding victory reflects the deep trust of the American people. The two leaders reiterated the importance of the India-U.S. Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership for global peace and stability.

Besides PM Modi, UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu were also among the first to congratulate Trump. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky also extended his congratulations to Trump on his "impressive" victory and expressed hope that his presidency would bring "peace in Ukraine closer" amid the ongoing conflict with Russia.

French President Emmanuel Macron expressed readiness for renewed cooperation. Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni also extended her warm wishes to the 47th US President.

Trump picks up Cabinet, administration

The President-elect is picking from his most loyal supporters as he creates his Cabinet and appoints others to key roles within his administration.

From Pete Hegseth as defense secretary and Robert F. Kennedy Jr. as head of the Department of Health and Human Services, Trump appears to be selecting from the pool of contenders who

were loyal to him while he was running for reelection.

However, Trump has also selected several Indian-Americans for prominent positions in his prospective administration. These appointments include roles in law enforcement, government efficiency, and health.

He nominated Kash Patel to lead the FBI, replacing Christopher Wray, subject to Senate confirmation. Vivek Ramaswamy, a former presidential candidate, was chosen by Trump to head the Department of Government Efficiency. The US President-elect has also nominated Dr. Jay Bhattacharya to direct the National Institutes of Health. Usha Chilukuri Vance, wife of incoming Vice President JD Vance, will serve as the second lady.

Another individual mentioned for a position in the Trump administration is Tulsi Gabbard who has advocated for stronger US-India relations during her time in Congress.

President-elect has also named Indian-American entrepreneur Sriram Krishnan as the Senior White House Policy Advisor on Artificial Intelligence (AI). Krishnan, a renowned venture capitalist and author, has an impressive background, having worked with tech giants like Twitter, Microsoft, Facebook, Yahoo!, and Snap.

In his new role, he will collaborate closely with David Sacks, who has been designated as the White House AI and Crypto Czar.

Tariff threats loom

Meanwhile, Trump has warned several countries about upcoming potential tariffs, as he gears up for his 'America First' policy to take a concrete shape. His proposals include a new 20 percent "universal" tariff on all foreign imports and hiking tariffs on China to 60 percent.

The European Union (EU) is open to discussing trade issues, including energy, with the US President-elect. His remarks came after Trump took to the social media platform Truth Social, warning the EU of potential tariffs if the bloc does not increase its purchase of US oil and gas.

He has pledged big tariffs on America's three largest trading partners - Canada, Mexico and China. Trump said he would impose a 25 percent tariff on imports from Canada and Mexico until they clamped down on drugs, particularly fentanyl, and migrants crossing the border.

He separately outlined "an additional 10 percent tariff, above any additional tariffs" on imports from China. It was not clear yet as he previously pledged to end China's most-favored-nation trading status and slap tariffs on Chinese imports in excess of 60 percent.



The inauguration of Donald Trump as the 47th president of the United States is scheduled to take place on January 20, 2025, on the West Front of the Capitol Hill in Washington, DC.

(Photo courtesy: X@realDonaldTrump)

New York: In a stunning comeback from his loss to Joe Biden in 2020, Republican Donald Trump carved out a decisive victory with wins in crucial swing states on November 5, defeating Vice-President Kamala Harris, the Democratic nominee. And billionaire Elon Musk was standing right behind him throughout the campaign.

"America has given us an unprecedented and powerful mandate," Trump, 78, told cheering supporters in Florida as he hailed a "magnificent victory".

"We made history," Trump said during his victory speech, staging a comeback against all odds. "This will truly be the golden age of America. That's why this is a magnificent victory for the American people that will allow us to make

America great again", he said at his West Palm Beach campaign headquarters.

President Joe Biden declared that Vice President Harris will "continue the fight" and be a "leader for generations" even though she lost the election to succeed him.

"She will continue the fight with purpose, determination, and joy. She will continue to be a champion for all Americans", Biden said in a statement. "Above all, she will continue to be a leader our children will look up to for generations to come as she puts her stamp on America's future", he added. In her concession speech, Harris said she was proud of the campaign and stressed that "when we lose an election, we accept the results".

"I am so proud of the race we

ran and the way we ran it. Over the 107 days of this campaign, we have been intentional about building community and building coalitions, bringing people together from every walk of life and background, united by the love of the country with enthusiasm and joy in our fight for America's future. And we did it with the knowledge that we all have so much more in common than what separates us," Harris said.

"While I concede this election, I do not concede the fight that fueled this campaign," she said. "Sometimes the fight takes a while. That doesn't mean we won't win."

In her speech, Harris highlighted Democrats' key issues such as abortion, gun violence, and equal justice, vowing that "we will



(Photo courtesy: X@realDonaldTrump)



Indian-Americans chosen for key roles in Trump 2.0 administration

emerged as a key ally of Trump after dropping out of the Republican race and endorsing the MAGA leader. Ramaswamy, a prominent critic of government bureaucracy, will lead the newly proposed Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) along with Elon Musk.

Tulsi Gabbard – Director of National Intelligence

Tulsi Gabbard, a former Democratic congresswoman and 2020 presidential candidate, jumped ship to support Trump during his campaign. A military veteran with three deployments to West Asia and Africa, she has been vocal about her skepticism towards foreign military interventions. Gabbard is set to take on the role of Director of National Intelligence in the Trump 2.0 administration. Notably, she is a Hindu but does not have a direct connection to India.

Kash Patel – Director of the FBI

Kashyap 'Kash' Patel, a former Republic-

an House staffer with extensive experience in defense and intelligence is Trump's choice for the director of Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) - the elite domestic law enforcement agency in US. Patel, a staunch Trump loyalist, has previously served as a Senior Director of the Counterterrorism Directorate at the National Security Council and as Chief of Staff to Acting Defense Secretary Christopher Miller.

Harmeet K. Dhillon – Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights

Harmeet Dhillon, an Indian-American lawyer, has been nominated by Trump as the Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights at the US Department of Justice. Dhillon, a prominent Republican figure and advocate for free speech, has had a distinguished career in litigation and constitutional law.

Usha Vance – Second Lady

Usha Vance is the wife of Vice President-elect JD Vance. Though she is not dir-

ectly a part of the cabinet, she will be the first Indian-origin Second Lady of the United States after her husband is sworn-in. Raised in an upper-middle-class suburb of San Diego, she is a litigator with a strong academic background.

Dr. Jay Bhattacharya – Director, National Institutes of Health (NIH)

Dr. Jay Bhattacharya, a Kolkata-born professor of health policy at Stanford University, will be the new Director of the NIH.

Sriram Krishnan – Senior policy advisor on Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Krishnan is the latest Indian-American picked by Trump to help shape the policy on AI. An Indian-American entrepreneur, venture capitalist and author, Krishnan began his career at Microsoft, where he was a founding member of Windows Azure, before moving on to significant roles at Facebook, Snap, and Twitter (now X).

President-elect Donald Trump will officially take charge of the White House on January 20 and has already announced a flurry of appointments in the weeks since he won the presidential elections. Several Indian-Americans are among the top officials who will make up the Trump 2.0 administration. Most of them, like Kashi Patel and Tulsi Gabbard, have been given crucial roles in the incoming administration.

Here's a look at some of the most likely candidates from the Indian-American community who could make it to Trump's Cabinet:

Vivek Ramaswamy – Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE)

Vivek Ramaswamy, the biotech entrepreneur and former presidential candidate,

Bruhat Soma wins 2024 Scripps National Spelling Bee



(Photo courtesy: Scripps National Spelling Bee/Facebook)

Bruhat Soma, a seventh grader from Florida, claimed the US National Spelling Bee champion title, a Scripps Cup trophy, and a

check for \$50,000 after correctly spelling a 90-second spell off against the second runner-up 12-year-old Faizan Zaki from Texas.

12-year-old Bruhat spelled 29 words correctly in the tiebreaker, beating Zaki by nine, to win the title on Thursday night. His winning word was "abseil," meaning "a descent in mountaineering using a rope looped over a projection above."

The Scripps National Spelling Bee attracted 11 million contestants from around the world, and Soma emerged as one of the most confident finalists.

He is the 28th Indian-American to have held the title. The 12-year-old beat 228 other competitors, including 7 finalists.

NYC public schools celebrated Diwali with a holiday

New York City public schools officially celebrated Diwali as a school holiday, marking a historic milestone that underscores the city's dedication to cultural inclusivity and respect for the heritage of its South Asian communities.

This decision followed years of advocacy from South Asian community leaders and

local officials who highlighted Diwali's importance as both a religious and cultural occasion.

This inclusion of Diwali as a holiday is a significant stride forward in supporting representation and inclusivity for New York City's growing South Asian population and serves as an example for other districts nationwide.

Modi's whirlwind US trip achieved 'very significant outcome'

During a whirlwind trip of about 55 hours, Prime Minister Narendra Modi achieved "very significant outcomes" in bilateral and multilateral domains and India was able to share its thoughts on a global stage.

Prime Minister Modi's visit included meetings with President Joe Biden and other leaders, participation in the Quad and United Nations summits, and speaking at a rally of the diaspora.

The visit had "a very strong technology element", not only with the roundtable of tech CEOs, but also in the joint statement of the Quad, the US-India bilateral factsheet, and Prime Minister Modi's other settings.

The CEOs of major tech companies like Google, Nvidia, Global Foundry and IBM, as well as bioscience giants like Moderna and Biogen, participated in the roundtable.

The joint fact sheet released by the White House said President Biden and Prime Minister Modi agreed to drive new AI innovation opportunities, enhance Research and Development collaboration on advanced semiconductor processors, and increase support for India's National Quantum Mission.

The Summit of the Future adopted a Pact for the Future committing the world leaders to an action plan to meet the challenges facing the world and the UN and it called for speeding up the Security Council reform process.

The Wilmington Declaration, released



(From left) Australian PM Anthony Albanese, PM Narendra Modi, President Joe Biden and Japanese PM Fumio Kishida in Delaware. (Photo courtesy: X/@narendramodi)

after the meeting of Quad leaders US President Joe Biden, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida in Delaware, recognised India's leadership in finalising the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (IOIP) and supported its implementation.

Quad agreed to implement the 'Maritime Initiative for Training in the Indo-Pacific (MAITRI) to monitor and secure waters, enforce laws, and deter unlawful behavior. To reduce the number of lives lost to cancer in the Indo-Pacific, the group launched a 'Quad Cancer Moonshot' focussing initially on combating cervical cancer.

'Samosa' caucus expands to include six Indian Americans

Six Indian Americans won in the November 2024 elections to the House of Representatives, increasing their number from five.

Indian-American lawyer Suhas Subramanyam created history by becoming the first from the community to be elected from Virginia and the entire East Coast.

He joined the 'Samosa Caucus' in the Congress that currently comprises five Indian Americans - Ami Bera, Raja Krishnamoorthi, Ro Khanna, Pramila Jayapal and Shri Thanedar. All the five Indian American members were re-elected to the House of Representatives.

Shri Thanedar was re-elected for the second consecutive term from the 13th Congressional District of Michigan. He won it for the first time in 2023.

Raja Krishnamoorthi won the seventh Congressional District of Illinois for the fifth consecutive term.

So did Ro Khanna who represents the seventeenth Congressional District of California and Congresswoman Pramila Jay-



Suhas Subramanyam made history as the first from the community to win from Virginia and the East Coast. (Photo courtesy: Suhas Subramanyam/Facebook)

apal, who represents the seventh Congressional District of Washington State.

A physician by profession, Dr Ami Bera is the senior-most Indian American Congressman representing the sixth Congressional District of California since 2013. He was re-elected for the seventh consecutive term.

Happy New Year 2025

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Unstoppable Modi

The 2024 elections saw a remarkable voter turnout, with a significant portion of the electorate showing continued confidence in Narendra Modi's leadership and vision for the country for the record third time



President Droupadi Murmu, Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar, PM Narendra Modi, and other dignitaries at the swearing-in ceremony in Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi, on June 9, 2024.

New Delhi: Ten years back, the Narendra Modi tsunami left the Congress battered and reduced to its lowest tally of 44 seats in the Lok Sabha. In 2024, his magic continued and he was sworn-in as India's Prime Minister for the third time on June 9, following another decisive victory in the 2024 Parliamentary elections which further solidified his leadership.

In his victory speech, Modi 4 hailed the people for reposing their faith in the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) for the third time. Stressing this is the mandate for "Viksit Bharat". PM Modi said "this is the victory of 140 crore Indians."

The PM highlighted that this is the first time after 1962 that a government after completing two terms has returned to power for the third consecutive time. He also praised the Election Commission (EC) for successfully conducting the elections, saying 100 crore voters, 11 lakh polling stations, 1.5 crore poll officials, 50 lakh EVMs and everyone performed their duty in such heat and security personnel performed exemplary well.

The BJP won 240 seats, down from the 303 it had secured in 2019, and lost its singular majority in the Lok Sabha, although the NDA overall secured 293 of the house's 543 seats. The INDIA coalition outperformed expectations, securing 234 seats, 99 of which were won by the Congress, garnering the party the official opposition status for the first time in 10 years. Seven independents and 10 candidates from non-aligned parties also won seats in the Lok Sabha.

Modi's third term is expected to build on the foundations laid during his previous tenures, with a renewed emphasis on technological innovation, infrastructure development, and international diplomacy, further positioning India as a global powerhouse. The

unprecedented third term underscores his enduring appeal and the trust placed in him by millions of Indians to lead the nation towards greater prosperity and stability.

Inspired by the motto of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas', Modi has ushered in a paradigm shift in governance that has led to inclusive, development-oriented and corruption-free governance. The Prime Minister has worked with speed and scale to realise the aim of Antyodaya, or ensuring last-mile delivery of schemes and services.

Leading international agencies have noted that under the leadership of PM Narendra Modi, India has been eliminating poverty at record pace. According to the findings from NITI Aayog's latest report 'Multidimensional Poverty in India since 2005-06', almost 25 crore people escaped multidimensional poverty in the last nine years. The credit for this remarkable achievement goes to significant initiatives of the government to address all dimensions of poverty.

Today, India is home to the world's largest healthcare pro-

gramme, Ayushman Bharat. Covering over 50 crore Indians, Ayushman Bharat provides top quality and affordable healthcare to the poor and neo-middle class.

Understanding that financial exclusion was a bane for the poor, the Prime Minister launched the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, that aimed at opening bank accounts for every Indian. Now, over 54 crore Jan Dhan accounts have been opened. These accounts have not only banked the unbanked but also opened the doors for other avenues of empowerment.

Going a step ahead of Jan Dhan, Shri Modi emphasised on Jan Suraksha, by giving insurance and pension cover to the most vulnerable sections of society. The JAM trinity (Jan Dhan- Aadhaar- Mobile) has led to elimination of middlemen and ensured transparency and speed, powered by technology.

The Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, launched in 2016 provides free cooking gas connections to the poor. It has proven to be a major game-changer in providing smoke-free kitchens to over 10 crore beneficiaries, most of whom are women. About 18,000 villages that were without electricity even after 70 long years of Independence have been electrified.

Modi believes that no Indian should be homeless and to realise this vision, over 4.2 crore houses were sanctioned under the PM Awas Yojana between 2014 and 2024. In June 2024, after assuming office for the third term, one of the first decisions of the Cabinet was to assist 3 crore additional rural and urban households for

the construction of houses, underscoring Modi's commitment to addressing the nation's housing needs and ensuring dignity and a quality life for every citizen.

Agriculture is a sector that is very close to Narendra Modi. During the interim budget of 2019, the government announced a monetary incentive for farmers called the PM Kisan Samman Nidhi. In almost three weeks, on February 24 2019, the scheme was launched and instalments have been paid regularly since then.

During the first Cabinet Meeting of PM Modi's second term, it was decided to extend the PM Kisan benefits to all farmers, removing

the 5 acre limit that was present earlier. As of June 2024, Modi released the 17th instalment of the PM-KISAN scheme at Varanasi, in which more than 9.2 crore farmers received the benefits amounting to over Rs 20,000 crore.

PM Modi launched the 'Make in India' initiative to turn India into an international manufacturing powerhouse. India has made significant strides in 'Ease of Doing Business', improving its ranking from 142 in 2014 to 63 in 2019. The government rolled out the GST during a historic session of Parliament in 2017, which has realised the dream of 'One Nation, One Tax.'

Meanwhile, Modi has been bestowed with 20 civilian honors to date, the latest one being Kuwait's highest honor 'The Order of Mubarak Al Kabeer'.

Before Kuwait, Guyana, Dominica and Nigeria, PM Modi had been conferred highest civilian honors in Saudi Arabia (King Abdulaziz Sash, 2016), Afghanistan (State Order of Ghazi Amir Amanullah Khan, 2016), Palestine (Grand Collar of the State of Palestine Award, 2018), UAE (Order of Zayed Award, 2019), Russia (Order of St. Andrew the Apostle, 2019 - received by PM Modi in July 2024), Maldives (Order of the Distinguished Rule of Nishan Izzuddin, 2019), Bahrain (King Hamad Order of the Renaissance, 2019), US (Legion of Merit by the US Armed Forces in 2020), Bhutan (Order of the Druk Gyalpo, 2021) Papua New Guinea (Ebaki Award, 2023), Fiji (Companion of the Order of Fiji, 2023), Papua New Guinea (Grand Companion of the Order of Logohu, 2023), Egypt (Order of Nile, 2023), France (Grand Cross of the Legion of Honour, 2023), Greece (Grand Cross of the Order of Honour, 2023).

In addition to these highest civilian honors, PM Modi has received several prestigious awards from renowned global organisations.



PM Modi receiving Kuwait's highest honor 'The Order of Mubarak Al Kabeer'. He has been bestowed with 20 civilian honors to date.



(All photos courtesy: Press Information Bureau)

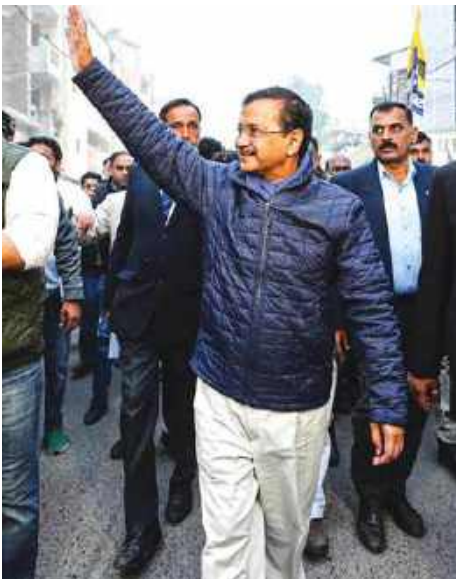
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By Shubham Ghosh

The year 2024 is nearing its end and for India, it was a significant one. The country and its people were in the headlines for several reasons throughout 2024 and we must recall them while waiting for the New Year – 2025. The year 2024 was one of the elections in India. Besides the general election, several states also went to polls, and while the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, had a less-than-satisfying result in the national polls, it made up for the disappointment with some favorable provincial voting outcomes.

Arvind Kejriwal's forgettable year

An Opposition leader in India who regularly made the headlines in 2024 is Arvind Kejriwal. The former chief minister of Delhi and leader of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) was arrested in an alleged liquor policy scam in March, prompting the Opposition parties to call it a political vendetta. He continued to move in and out of the prison as the Supreme Court granted him bails and in September, he came up with a stunning decision to quit as the CM and paved the way for party colleague Atishi to take over.



(Photo courtesy: Arvind Kejriwal/Facebook)

Manipur continues to burn

Violence continued unabated in the north-eastern state of Manipur in 2024, completing more than a year-and-a-half since it first started as ethnic clashes in May 2023. The conflicts between the majority Meitei and the minority Kuki communities saw more than 250 people dead and several thousands losing

homes.

The cold-blooded murder of six members of a family after they were allegedly kidnapped by suspected militants from a relief camp in November resulted in massive protests in the state and the houses of many government officials were targeted.

RG Kar Hospital incident

In Asia's oldest private medical college located in the eastern city of Kolkata, a junior woman doctor was gruesomely raped and murdered late on the night of August 9. Massive protests followed, not only in the city but in several other places in India and also overseas demanding justice for the 31-year-old victim. Eminent people from various walks of life held nightlong

protests in Kolkata seeking punishment for the culprits, which many suspected was more than one.

The former principal of the institute, Sandip Ghosh, who was arrested after the Central Bureau of Investigation started its probe, was granted bail on December 13. One person named Sanjoy Roy was arrested in the case but he pleaded not guilty.

Top political highlights of India in 2024

Modi returns as PM but BJP loses dominance

In the national elections held in seven phases between April 19 and June 1, the BJP failed to win a majority on its own, unlike in the 2014 and 2019 tests. Leaders and supporters of the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) had claimed that the bloc would go past 400 seats out of 543, which has happened only once in the past (1984). But the BJP's tally of 240, sixty-three less than that in 2019, meant that the dream remained a distant one (NDA got 293). Modi returned to the office of the prime minister for the third successive time but with a reduced majority and the support of regional allies such as the Janata Dal (United) and Telugu Desam Party.

The Opposition, which emerged under the new name of Indian National Developmental and Inclusive Alliance (INDIA), witnessed a revival of sorts with 232



In 2024, along with the Lok Sabha elections, India witnessed voting in eight state assemblies. (Photo courtesy: Election Commission of India)

seats, with the leading Indian National Congress taking its tally to 99 from a poor 52 five years ago.

State elections

While the Lok Sabha elections left the BJP's supporters dejected, the party's electoral show in a

number of states brought them joy. While the party won prestige battles in the key states of Maharashtra, India's most developed one, and Haryana, where it returned to power for the third successive time, it registered history in the eastern state of Odisha by

grabbing power there for the first time in history, ending the 24-year-rule of Naveen Patnaik of the local Biju Janata Dal.

The BJP also retained power in the north-eastern-most state of Arunachal Pradesh and came to power in another southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, in alliance with the TDP of Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu and Janasena Party led by actor-politician Pawan Kalyan. The victories in Maharashtra and Haryana were particularly satisfactory for the BJP leaders and cadre since a lot was at stake and the party did well to overcome the challenges, including anti-incumbency.

The BJP lost elections in the two states of Jammu and Kashmir, where polling was held for the first time since the abrogation of Article 370 in 2019, and Jharkhand, where Chief Minister Hemant Soren was arrested and jailed in connection with an alleged land scam.

Diplomatic relations

India and the United States | New Delhi's ties with Washington continued to flourish in several areas, including government, private and people-to-people sectors. Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited the country in September where he attended the QUAD Summit while high-level teams from both countries continued to visit the other. New Delhi welcomed the election of Donald Trump as the president for the second time and vowed to work closely with his administration. A couple of issues remained in the two nations' ties that tended to be overshadowed by all the positive developments.

First was the case related to US-based pro-Khalistan leader Gurbatwant Singh Pannun. While Washington charged a former Indian intelligence officer for allegedly being involved in a foiled plot to eliminate Pannun, an American citizen, it also kept communication links open with India saying in October that there was an important engagement with India's probe committee into the matter.

In November, American prosecutors indicted Indian billionaire businessman Gautam Adani over an alleged bribery scheme to bag lucrative solar power contracts. Adani, who is seen to be close to PM Modi, and seven other associates, including nephew Sagar Adani were accused in the matter. The Adani Group refuted the charges.

India and Canada | Ever since the killing of Canadian-Sikh leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar outside a gurdwara in British Columbia in June 2023, and



(Graphic courtesy: X@DepSecStateMR)

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau accusing the Indian government of involvement in the murder, serious diplomatic problems evolved between the nations that continued in 2024. In May, three individuals – all Indian nationals -- were arrested by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in connection with a probe into Nijjar's killing. They were charged with first-degree murder and conspiracy to commit murder.

In October, the Canadian media reported that the case was ongo-

ing and had been adjourned for the fifth time while Ottawa continued to work to disclose documents related to the case. In the same month, Canada expelled six Indian diplomats, after the law-enforcement officials accused the Indian government's agents of being linked to various "acts of violence" against the Sikh separatists on their soil. India retaliated soon after by expelling six Canadian diplomats and rejecting allegations made by the Canadian government.



By Vipul Tamhane

The year 2024 was marked by a series of pivotal geopolitical events that shaped international relations, influenced global security dynamics, and highlighted the complexities of a multipolar world. As we reflect on the key developments that defined the geopolitical landscape throughout the year, it becomes clear that these events have set the stage for 2025, a year that holds the potential for both challenges and opportunities.

Evolving bilateral relations

In this year, we witnessed significant shifts in bilateral relations among various nations, reflecting the complexities of a rapidly changing geopolitical landscape. As countries navigated economic competition, security threats, and climate change, their interactions evolved, underscoring both cooperation and tension. One of the most closely watched relationships was between the United States and China. Following a high-stakes summit in San Francisco, both nations committed to dialogue aimed at addressing trade imbalances and technological rivalry. However, unresolved issues regarding Taiwan and cybersecurity continued to strain relations.

In the Middle East, the relationship between Israel and Arab nations evolved amid ongoing conflict. Violence in Gaza prompted renewed diplomatic efforts from the US and Arab states to propose a peace initiative for a two-state solution. These evolving bilateral relations emphasized the importance of strategic diplomacy in an interconnected world.

Evolving conflicts between nations in 2024

The year 2024 underscored the intricate web of geopolitical rivalries and the persistent challenges in achieving lasting peace. As countries grappled with historical grievances and territorial disputes, the potential for escalation loomed large, emphasizing the critical need for diplomacy and international cooperation.

The Russia-Ukraine conflict remained a focal point, with Ukraine launching a renewed counteroffensive to reclaim occupied territories, bolstered by NATO support. However, Russia's intensified military operations and cyberattacks further escalated tensions. In the South China Sea, territorial disputes prompted the US to reaffirm its commitment to freedom of naviga-



The Russia-Ukraine conflict remained a focal point, with Kyiv launching a renewed counteroffensive to reclaim occupied territories. (Photo courtesy: Volodymyr Zelenskyy/Facebook)

tion. Meanwhile, renewed violence in Gaza and southern Lebanon highlighted the fragility of peace in the Middle East. A coalition of Arab nations, the US, and the EU proposed a new peace initiative aimed at a two-state solution, offering a glimmer of hope amidst ongoing tensions.

Nuclear disarmament efforts

A landmark conference in Geneva brought together representatives from over 100 nations to discuss nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. A new treaty proposal received support from both nuclear and non-nuclear states, marking a significant step toward reducing the global threat of nuclear weapons. The emphasis on a collaborative approach to disarmament reflects a growing recognition of the need for international cooperation on security issues. As we enter 2025, the momentum gained from this conference could lead to new treaties or agreements aimed at reducing nuclear arsenals.

Climate change and global cooperation

The effects of climate change became increasingly evident in 2024, prompting a surge in global action. The United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP29) in Nairobi saw leaders, scientists, and activists unite to forge ambitious climate strategies. Key outcomes included commitments to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050 and the establishment of a global fund to support climate adaptation in developing nations. The year was also marked by devastating climate-induced disasters, including Hurricane Helene, which underscored the urgent need for resilience and adaptation strategies. As we move into 2025, the implementa-

tion of COP29 commitments will be critical in shaping international climate policy.

Social justice movements

Human rights and environmental advocacy movements gained unprecedented traction in 2024, with protests erupting worldwide demanding accountability for systemic injustices and environmental degradation. Notable demonstrations in Brazil focused on Amazon deforestation and indigenous rights.

The 2024 US presidential election became a focal point for discussions on racial equality, healthcare access, and climate action, with record voter turnout reflecting a shift toward progressive policies. The momentum gained by social justice movements in 2024 is likely to continue influencing political discourse and policy decisions in 2025.

Technology and scientific breakthroughs

The rapid advancement of technology in 2024 spurred both excitement and ethical concerns. A global summit on AI ethics in Tokyo addressed critical issues surrounding privacy, employment, and the military applications of artificial intelligence. The resulting international guidelines emphasized the necessity of human oversight in decision-making processes.

In a historic milestone, SpaceX successfully launched the first crewed mission to Mars, led by CEO Elon Musk, marking a significant step toward humanity's potential for future colonization. AI researcher Dr Fei-Fei Li gained recognition for developing AI systems that prioritize human values, influencing global research and policy.

In medicine, Dr Katalin Karikó and Dr Drew Weissman received the

Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine for their groundbreaking work on mRNA technology, pivotal in combating the COVID-19 pandemic. Russia announced plans for an mRNA-based cancer vaccine for free distribution in 2025, while the University of Florida made strides in treating brain tumors. Dr Jennifer Doudna was awarded

the Lasker Award for her contributions to CRISPR technology, opening new avenues in medicine and agriculture.

Cultural milestones

The 2024 Paris Olympics served as a platform for unity and cultural exchange, showcasing the talents of athletes from around the world. With a record number of female athletes participating, the event highlighted the progress made in gender equality in sports. The opening ceremony's message of peace resonated globally, emphasizing the unifying power of sports in a time of division. The World Cultural Forum in Lisbon brought together artists and thinkers to explore culture's role in addressing global challenges, underscoring the potential of cultural exchange to bridge divides.

Humanity rises amidst political upheaval

The past year was marked by significant regime changes in countries like Sudan, Myanmar, and Bangladesh, highlighting the fragility of global political systems and the humanitarian crises that ensued. Escalating civil conflict in Sudan displaced millions, while Myanmar's military coup continued to suppress democratic movements, exacerbating political instability in Bangladesh and increasing regional tensions.

The humanitarian landscape was dire, with nearly 300 million people

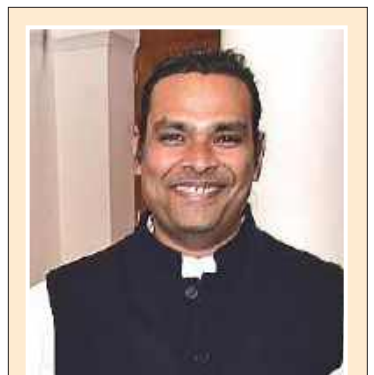
requiring assistance globally due to conflicts, climate emergencies, and economic instability. The situations in Gaza, Sudan, and Syria were particularly critical, with millions facing severe resource shortages. Despite these challenges, there were humanitarian triumphs, as organizations mobilized resources to respond to crises and local communities demonstrated remarkable resilience.

Amidst these struggles, a notable push for multilateralism emerged, with countries collaborating to tackle global challenges like climate change, health crises, and security threats. Grassroots movements advocating for democracy, human rights, and environmental justice gained momentum, leading to greater political engagement among citizens, particularly 'the youth'.

Setting the stage for 2025

As we stand on the brink of 2025, the events of 2024 have woven a delicate fabric of hope and resilience. The global stage is set, and shaped by the interplay of diplomacy, social movements, and the courage to confront ongoing conflicts. Each nation, with its unique story, holds the potential for dialogue, fostering understanding amidst unresolved tensions.

Somewhere in Oriental East, the clouds of conflict hover, with a hostile giant gearing up to take on a tiny state with the possibility of allies coming through in need; where somewhere the possibility of peace dances on the horizon as in Eastern Europe. While nations explore new paths to independence through multilateral currencies, signaling a shift toward collaboration. The Middle East, too, whispers promises of peace initiatives, igniting hope in the hearts of many. With lessons learned, we step forward together, embracing a future where cooperation and compassion guide our journey toward a brighter, more stable world in 2025.



The writer is a counter-terrorism expert and a visiting faculty with Pune University (SPPU) at the Department of Defense and Strategic Studies. He is also the founder & editor-in-chief at Diplomacy Direct, a public interest think-tank. He can be contacted at vipul@exestat.com.



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New Delhi: As the world economies faltered this year amid geo-political turmoil, India's growth story remained intact as inflation was on the declining path and the balance between inflation and growth was well poised. The country's external sector was stable and foreign exchange reserves scaled a new peak this year.

On its way to become the world's third largest economy, India is projected to witness 6.5 per cent real GDP growth in the current and next fiscal (FY25 and FY26), according to the latest 'EY Economy Watch December 2024'. It projected that combining the real GDP growth of first two quarters of FY25 at 6.7 per cent and 5.4 per cent, respectively, with RBI's revised growth estimates for 3Q and 4Q FY25 at 6.8 per cent and 7.2 per cent, respectively, "the annual FY25 real GDP growth may be estimated at 6.6 per cent".

"However, if the turnaround in GoI's investment expenditure remains subdued, Q3 growth may be 6.5 percent or less," the report mentioned. The real GDP growth eased to 5.4 percent in the July-September quarter (Q2 FY25), compared to 6.7 percent in the preceding quarter.

Inflation under control

Headline manufacturing PMI witnessed a softer expansion of 56.5 in November compared to 57.5 in October. Services PMI, however, remained nearly stable at 58.4 in November 2024, close

to its level of 58.5 in October 2024, on account of strong international demand and improving business confidence.

As per the data released by the Federation of Automobile Dealers Association, retail sales of motor vehicles continued to show a double-digit growth of 11.2 per cent in November. In particular, retail sales of two wheelers and tractors showed robust growth rates of 15.8 percent and 29.9 percent, respectively, in November 2024, according to the EY report.

CPI inflation eased to 5.5 per cent in November from 6.2 per cent in October as vegetable prices eased, whereas core CPI inflation remained steady at 3.7 per cent for the second successive month. WPI inflation also moderated to 1.9 per cent in November from 2.4 per cent in October.

According to DK Srivastava, Chief Policy Advisor, EY India, in the medium-term, India's real GDP growth prospects can be kept at 6.5 per cent per year, provided the government accelerates its capital expenditure growth in the remaining part of the current fiscal year and comes up with a medium-term investment pipeline "with participation from the GoI and state governments and both their respective public sector entities, and the private corporate sector".

According to Jefferies, the improvement in India's economic growth after the slowdown in the July-September quarter is visible as movement indicators like fuel consumption, vehicles tolled and air traffic have strengthened.

The Jefferies' economy tracker composite indicator shows growth pick-up sustaining in November with the indicator up

Indian economy shows the way

Despite geo-political uncertainties and high inflation globally, the Indian economy fared much better this year due to strong market fundamentals and resilient growth, with projections to see 6.5 percent real GDP growth in the current as well as next fiscal



The Indian economy remains healthy due to strong urban consumption and ongoing investment in infrastructure. (Photo courtesy: X@nitin_gadkari)

6.4 per cent year-on-year, the second fastest growth pace in 13 months. "The festive season created month-on-month volatility due to Diwali timings," it said.

The combined October-November activity growth at 6.5 per cent is a "substantial improvement" over recent months, with growth fastest in five quarters, the Jefferies report states. "We believe that the revival in government capex and liquidity rise on relaxed RBI policies should improve GDP growth in the quarters ahead," the brokerage said.

Broad-based indicators mostly improved. During November, a significant improvement was seen in diesel consumption which saw the highest jump in 13 months, on a year-on-year basis, the report stated.

"Monetary tightening should be behind us," analysts at Jefferies said in the note. The RBI's stance on liquidity also reflected well in overnight liquidity being in surplus for the past three months. We believe monetary conditions will continue to ease in early 2025," Jefferies said.

India's retail inflation based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI)

was expected to ease to 5.5 per cent in November due to a decline in food prices, according to a Morgan Stanley report.

No slowdown in manufacturing sector

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman stated in Parliament that the lower-than-expected GDP growth in the second quarter of the current financial year is a "temporary blip" and growth would pick up in the coming months.

The finance minister pointed out that India has experienced steady and sustained growth, with an average GDP growth rate of 8.3 per cent over the past three years and continues to be the fastest-growing major economy. "At 5.4 per cent, the Q2 growth rate is slower than expected. Q2 of this financial year has been a challenging quarter for India and most other economies of the world," she said.

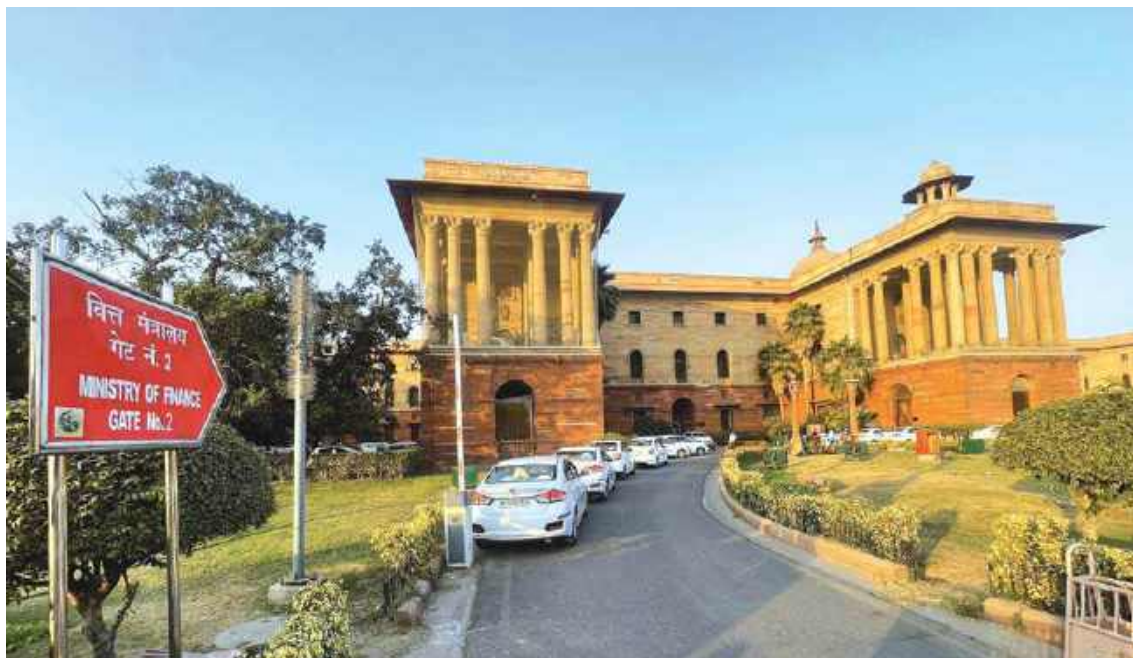
She also pointed out that there is no broad-based slowdown in the manufacturing sector. "A generalised slowdown in manufac-

turing is not expected, as it is restricted to a few segments. Out of 23 manufacturing sectors in the Index of Industrial Production, about half of them remain strong even now," the Finance Minister further stated.

S&P Global Ratings also projected 6.8 per cent growth for the Indian economy in FY25, followed by 6.9 per cent growth in FY26, on the back of strong urban consumption, steady service sector growth, and ongoing investment in infrastructure.

According to outgoing RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das, India's growth story was intact as "going forward, high-frequency indicators available so far suggest that the slowdown in domestic economic activity bottomed out in the second quarter of this year and it has since recovered aided by strong festive demand and pickup in rural activities."

The central bank, in its recent Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) meeting, announced a cash reserve ratio (CRR) cut of 50 bps which will add over Rs 1.16 lakh crore of liquidity into the banking system and bring down market interest rates.



According to Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, there is no broad-based slowdown in the manufacturing sector. (Photo courtesy: X@FinMinIndia)

India aims to cut fiscal deficit to 4.5% of GDP

New Delhi: The government will continue its focus on improving quality spending, strengthening the social security net and reducing the fiscal deficit to 4.5 per cent of the GDP in the financial year 2025-2026, according to a Finance Ministry statement.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is expected to continue with the government's position of increasing expenditure on big-ticket infrastructure projects and social wel-

fare schemes for the poor while keeping the fiscal deficit in check when she presents the Union Budget for 2025-26 in Parliament on February 1.

The government is committed to pursuing the glide path of fiscal consolidation which aims to lower the fiscal deficit to 4.5 per cent of GDP by financial year 2025-26, according to Finance Ministry statements on the half-yearly review of the trends in receipts and expenditure.



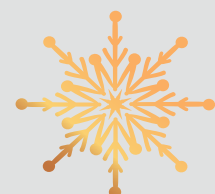
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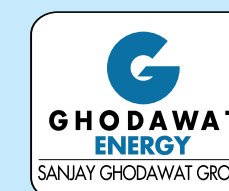
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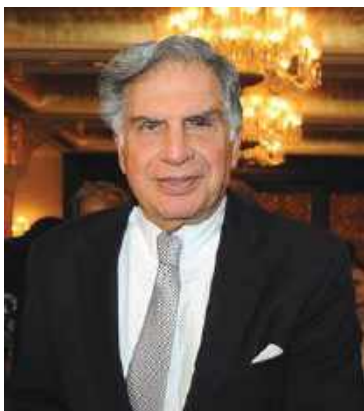
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The passing of these prominent figures in 2024 has left an indelible mark on their respective fields. Their contributions will be remembered, and their legacies will continue to influence the generations to come.

Ratan Tata



(Photo courtesy: Wikipedia.org)

Ratan Tata, the former chairman of Tata Sons, died at the age of 86 from age-related issues on October 9, 2024. He was admitted to Breach Candy Hospital in Mumbai on October 7, 2024 to treat age-related issues and control his blood pressure. He played a key role in transforming the Tata Group into a strong global company while staying true to its values of honesty, quality, and helping society.

He was the grandson of Jamsetji Tata, the founder of the Tata Group. He served as the chairman of the Tata Group from 1991 to 2012. Under his leadership, the Tata Group expanded globally, acquiring companies like TetleyTea, Jaguar Land Rover, and Corus Steel.

Zakir Hussain



(Photo courtesy: www.zakirhussain.com)

Famous Indian Tabla maestro Zakir Hussain breathed his last on December 15, 2024, at the age of 73 in San Francisco, California. Son of renowned Tabla virtuoso Ustad Alla Rakha, he received several prestigious awards -- the Padma Shri, Padma Bhushan and the Padma Vibhushan. In his six-decade career, he collaborated with the likes of John McLaughlin, Yo-Yo Ma, and George Harrison, bringing Indian classical music to the global stage.

Pankaj Udhas



(Photo Courtesy: Pankaj Udhas/Facebook)

Renowned ghazal singer Pankaj Udhas, best known for 'Chitthi Aye Hai' died in February 2024, following a prolonged illness. He was 72. In 2006, Pankaj Udhas was awarded Padma Shri, India's fourth-highest civilian award. His soulful renditions have captivated audiences for decades. Born on May 17, 1951, in Gujarat. He began his musical journey at a young age and rose to prominence in the 1980s and 1990s. Beyond his musical achievements, Udhas was also known for his philanthropic endeavors, actively supporting charitable causes and initiatives aimed at social welfare. In 1989, he released an album, 'Nabeel', which became one of his best-selling albums. The first copy of the album was placed at an auction where it was sold for a whopping amount of Rs 1 lakh. The money was donated to the Cancer Patients Aid Association. The ghazal maestro also actively worked for Parents Thalassaemia Unit. Throughout his illustrious career, Pankaj Udhas released numerous albums and singles, many of which have become timeless classics. His hit songs such as 'Chitthi Aayi Hai', 'Aur Ahista', and 'Jeeye To Jeeye Kaise' continue to resonate with listeners across generations.

Ustad Rashid Khan



(Photo courtesy: Wikipedia.org)

Music maestro Ustad Rashid Khan, who was undergoing treatment at a Kolkata-based hospital for prostate cancer, died in January 2024. The classical singer was 55.

Khan was known for his soulful renditions. Throughout his career, Rashid Khan received numerous accolades and awards, including the Padma Shri and the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award, among others, in recognition of his contribution to Indian classical music. His performances in prestigious music festivals and concerts worldwide have further solidified his reputation as a maestro of Hindustani classical music. He has contributed to songs such as 'Aaoge Jab Tum', 'Aaj Koi Jogee Aave', 'Rishte Naate', 'Ishq Ka Rang', and several others.

Shyam Benegal



(Photo courtesy: Wikipedia.org)

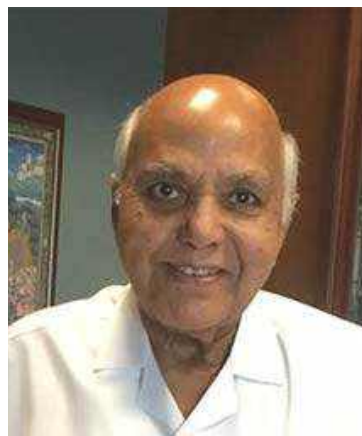
Acclaimed filmmaker Shyam Benegal passed away on December 23, 2024 in Mumbai following a long battle with chronic kidney-related disease. The cinematic genius will always be regarded as the man who gave birth to parallel cinema with films like - Ankur, Mandi, Sardari Begum, Zubeidaa and more.

Benegal's work in both mainstream and art films earned him widespread acclaim for its realism, depth, and storytelling excellence. His passing marks

the end of an era in Indian filmmaking.

Benegal's career spanned over five decades, cementing his position as a pioneering filmmaker in Indian cinema. He made his debut in the film industry with the 1974 movie Ankur. His subsequent films, such as "Nishant" (1975), "Manthan" (1976), and "Bhumika" (1977), solidified his reputation as a masterful director, earning him numerous national and international accolades. Later, Benegal also made several critically acclaimed films like "Mandi" (1983), "Trikaal" (1985), and "Sardari Begum" (1996). His last release was Mujib: The Making of a Nation, which hit theatres in 2023.

Ramoji Rao



(Photo courtesy: Wikipedia.org)

Cherukuri Ramoji Rao, a towering figure in the Indian media and film industry and the founder of Ramoji Film City, died at 87 in Hyderabad in June 2024. He was renowned for his entrepreneurial prowess and contributions to media conglomerates. Born on November 16, 1936, into an agricultural family in Andhra Pradesh's Pedaparupudi, Ramoji Rao grew up with a strong connection to farming. He pursued his education in literature and later became a successful businessman and media entrepreneur.

Sharda Sinha



(Photo courtesy: Wikipedia.org)

Sharda Sinha, popularly known as 'Bihar Kokila' succumbed to blood poisoning complications on November 05, 2024. She was 72.

A renowned Indian folk singer celebrated for her immense contributions to Bhojपुरi, Maithili, and Magahi music. She has been instrumental in bringing Bihar's traditional music to a wider audience. Among her most popular songs are Kelwa Ke Paat Par Ugalan Suraj Mal Jhake Jhuke, Hey Chhathi Maiya, Ho Dinanath, Bahangi Lachakat Jaaye, Roje Roje Ugelaa, Suna Chhathi Maai, Jode Jode Supawa, and Patna Ke Ghat Par. She was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 2018.

Rohit Bal



(Photo courtesy: Rohit Bal/Facebook)

Celebrated fashion designer Rohit Bal died following a heart attack on Nov 1, 2024. The 63-year-old was known for his exquisite designs, and his creations were worn by global celebrities such as Cindy Crawford, Pamela Anderson and Uma Thurman.

Fali S Nariman



(Photo courtesy: Wikipedia.org)

A distinguished Indian lawyer, Fali S Nariman died at the age of 95 from multiple ailments, including cardiovascular disease in February 2024. He strongly believed in a secular India and championed free speech. Nariman had resigned as Additional Solicitor General during the Emergency to protest censorship.

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NEW YEAR SPECIAL

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Helping to create a better world, one grant at a time

Started by Mukund Padmanabhan, the New York-based Guru Krupa Foundation has provided funds to charities and reputed institutions in India and the US since 2008 to help the needy, promote learning, and preserve heritage. The South Asian Times has compiled this Organization of the Year feature to salute and felicitate GKF and its founder.

By **Parveen Chopra**
Founding Editor, The SATimes
Founder, ALotusInTheMud.com

You may have read this story before. An old man, on his daily walk along the beach, spots a boy crouched by the water, scooping something up from the sand and throwing it into the sea.

The boy keeps shuffling a little further down the beach, repeating the same action again and again – stopping, scooping, throwing, moving.

“What are you doing there, boy?” the old man approached him.

“I’m saving these stranded starfish,” replied the boy.

“My boy,” the man said, “on this stretch of the beach alone, there must be a hundred stranded starfish. Around the next corner, there must be at least one thousand more. This goes on for miles and miles – I’ve done this walk every day here for 10 years, and it’s always the same. There must be millions of stranded starfish! I hate to say it, but you’ll never make a difference.”

The boy picked up one more starfish, threw it into the sea, and said, “Well, I just made a difference to this one.”

Mukund Padmanabhan is that kid. He cares, and he wants to make a difference, however small, no matter the enormity of the problem of inhuman living conditions of millions of deprived people who lack opportunities to break away from their



RKM Vivekananda Girls Higher Secondary School in Chennai – opening doors to the future for young children.



Serving the needs of seniors at the South Asian Council of Social Services in New York.

circumstances. So, in 2008, he started the Guru Krupa Foundation (GKF) on Long Island, New York, initially supporting just a handful of projects. With persistent and consistent work over the years, GKF’s footprint now extends to three score and more projects in India and the US.

He shares with The South Asian Times his motivation: “I spent the first 22 years of my life in various cities in India. Poverty is endemic in India, and you frequently come upon children begging on the streets for food. I wanted to do something about these distressing situations.”

“But before working on Wall Street, my resources were limited, and I did whatever I could by making small donations to organizations that helped the needy. Once I started making more money on Wall Street, I could expand the number of organizations I supported and the scale at which I supported them.”

He also realized that India does not have a monopoly on poverty and hunger, and many causes in his adopted country, too, deserved support.

To streamline his charitable activities better, Mukund decided to set up an organization instead of making individual donations to many charities. He would follow due diligence best practices, select charities in India and the US, and monitor the grants made to them. That is how GKF was born.

The selection process

But what is GKF’s grant selection process? Mukund explains, “We have four main focus areas - i) Social, ii) Higher education, iii) Spirituality and culture, and iv) Environment. To a large extent, these focus areas are guided by my personal experience, and from the applications that we receive for support.

“I’ve always had sympathy for kids who

(Continued on page 27>>)

Happy New Year!

Heartiest Congratulations to

**GURU KRUPA FOUNDATION
AND
SHRI MUKUND PADMANABHAN**

for the well-deserved prestigious recognition as

The South Asian Times
excellence in journalism



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(Continued from page 25)

are born into disadvantaged situations. So GKF activities started by supporting organizations that improved these kids' lives, such as non-profit schools and orphanages. Initially, all these organizations were in India, but now we also support organizations in the US that improve education outcomes in high-poverty schools by providing supplementary education, etc."

GKF also supports organizations that help other disadvantaged categories such as disabled people, old age homes, and food pantries. These are all grants that fall into GKF's 'Social' focus.

And how is the second category, "Higher Education" different from the "Social" category? Clarifies Mukund, "This second category focuses more on advanced study. I came to the US to study, as an international foreign student, fully supported on a scholarship. I thrived on the education I was able to get here and was able to make meaningful contributions to advance the state of art. Similar to me, many smart students in India have much to offer but are unable to avail of this route due to a lack of financial support. I wanted to open the doors of opportunity to this category of people by setting up scholarships at well-known universities and research institutions. "Social" projects address life-or-death situations at earlier stages of life, while "Higher education" projects serve to enable people to maximize their potential at a later stage of their lives."

How did the arc of his focus extend to organizations such as the Hindu American Foundation (HAF) and Flushing Town Hall (FTH)? Mukund, who always thinks things out, explains, "Though I have emphasized the importance and value of education, something even more basic than that is our sense of identity and community. Millennia of thought have been encoded in the cultural practices, spirituality, and value system of our community, and I believe that it is our responsibility to preserve these ideas and practices.

"At the same time, we must be cognizant of other cultures and seek to coexist with them and learn from them when appropriate. This leads to projects in our 'Spiritual/Cultural' focus, which support Hindu temples, *patasalas* and ashrams in India and

the US, and cultural programs that showcase Hindu culture. HAF and FTH fit this bill."

GKF's fourth category of 'Environment' is a relatively new focus area and was born out of a sense of practicality. Mukund says, "I am from Chennai and still have family there. I remember the alternate periods of drought and floods, and many studies have pointed to environmental degradation as a primary cause of these calamities. For our survival, humans had better start looking into these issues. Consequently, we started experimenting with supporting projects that restore and clean up water bodies in the Chennai area."

Implementing best practices

GKF is a private foundation that does not accept outside money, so they don't fundraise. Other than following IRS guidelines

“ Our “Social” projects address life-or-death situations at earlier stages of life, while “Higher education” projects serve to enable people to maximize their potential at a later stage of their lives ”

and filing tax returns, such organizations are not required to make any other information available. However, Mukund adds, "On principle, following best practices and being transparent about them is the right thing to do. Our best practices include hosting a website (<https://guru-krupa.org/>) that clearly states our priorities, lists our current and past projects, and outlines a well-defined procedure for organizations to apply for grants."

The foundation prefers specific projects with measurable deliverables (rather than generic funding) and requires organizations to follow stringent accounting practices and incur minimal costs. These preferences make it easy to track the progress of projects and ensure that funds are spent for the intended purpose.

Funding is only given to organizations in India and the US. In the US, the applicant must have IRS 501(c)(3) status. Applicants in India must have 80G certification (public charity) and FCRA clearance (permission to receive money from outside India).

"Once we receive an application," Mukund continues, "we check the organization's references, their financials, and in many cases visit the organization to verify the scope of its project. Once we make a grant, we also



Opening doors to the future for rural kids through education

require semi-annual reporting on its progress in most cases. I believe that following these practices will help GKF to provide maximum benefit with its grants."

Besides Mukund, the three other trustees of the organization are: Lalit Bahl, Deepak Nayak, and Amit Maitra. Says Mukund about his board: "My trustees are people whom I have known for a long time and who share many of my values. They are people I respect immensely. Coincidentally, we are all from IIT Kharagpur, so you could almost call us an IIT-KGP organization. Two of us - me and Deepak - also share UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles) as an alma mater. I am grateful to them for generously giving their time, pro bono."

All four are highly educated and accomplished people who expect efficiency and results from the projects GKF supports.

In addition to Mukund, the trustees travel to India to visit projects funded on their recommendation in their home states. The GKF team includes Adithi Menon, the grants manager who tracks project progress. With such a minimalistic staff, Mukund admits that many weekends are spent on GKF work, but this leads to developing first-hand information about supported projects and organizations.

The grants

The Guru Krupa Foundation takes a holistic approach to charitable giving. Project categories range from basic needs—food, shelter, health, and basic education—to more esoteric ones, such as arts and culture, spirituality, and the environment.

GKF spreads its net wide; the grantees range from an old age home in a far corner of India to the world-renowned Wiki

Education Foundation. In 2023, the organization gave over 70 grants, with around 80% focusing on social causes and a little over 10% in the Spiritual/cultural category. There are many smaller projects, particularly in the Social category, in India because a dollar goes a long way there.

Affirms Mukund, "Helping the impoverished people gets the most bang for the buck because, for them, it's a difference between not having a future and opening the door to a future. That is where it feels more like a duty rather than charity. Just to be able to do that is a great thing."

In dollar terms, 40% of GKF dollars are spent in India, and they account for 60% of the overall number of grants.

Well-known grantees focusing on social issues in India have included, Ekal Vidyalaya, Akshaya Patra, CRY America, and those focusing on social issues in the US include First Book, City Parks Foundation South Asian Council for Social Services, Long Island Cares, and others.

Grantees focusing on Culture include Spic Macay in India and organizations like Hindu American Foundation, Religion News Foundation, Flushing Town Hall and Long Island Children's Museum, among others.

However, to Mukund, no GKF project is greater or lesser in importance. UCLA and, to a lesser extent, IIT Kharagpur have been his biggest projects. At UCLA, he has established Fellowships and faculty Chairs and contributed to capital campaigns. At IIT Kharagpur, he has contributed to the newly instituted Academy of Culture and Fine Arts (ACFA) and established student scholarships (*details on page 30*).

Once GKF selects an organization for a grant, the grant generally continues in subsequent years, leading to a long-term association with good causes and organizations.

The impact

And what is the impact of all this giving?

In the "Social" category, the number of direct beneficiaries is in the thousands, with indirect beneficiaries probably numbering in the tens of thousands. In the "Higher Education" category, around 20-30 graduate students and around a hundred Undergrads have had their futures enabled through GKF Fellowships and Scholarships.

Beneficiaries in the "Spiritual/Cultural" category are harder to enumerate - what is the value of enabling activities that ensure



Promoting and preserving Indian culture and heritage.



Feeding school children through Akshaya Patra

(Continued on page 28>>)

ORGANIZATION
OF THE
YEAR 2024GURU KRUPA
Foundation Inc*(Continued from page 27)*

that one's Culture lives on ? What is the value of finding ways to live in harmony with the many different cultures that inhabit this planet? Says Mukund, "This is not something that can be easily quantified. Nor is it something that can be considered a charitable activity. This is a duty. We should not evaluate this through the benefits that accrue by doing our duty, but by the costs incurred by not doing it." There is a shloka in the Bhagavad Gita that encapsulates this perfectly

कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन।
मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भूर्मा ते सङ्गोऽस्त्वकर्मणि॥ २-४७
"Karmanye vadhikaraste Ma Phaleshu
Kadachana,
Ma Karmaphalaheturbhurma Te
Sangostvakarmani"

Despite the huge number of projects it supports and the total amount it has given, the Guru Krupa Foundation has remained low-profile. It may have to do with the reti-



Kanchi Shankaracharya Vijayendra Saraswati propounding religious knowledge at a patsala supported by GKF.

cent nature of Mukund Padmanabhan. A profile of GKF or Mukund is nowhere to be found in the media. GKF is not yet on the radar of Charity Navigator or a similar platform either. However, Trustee Amit Maitra told The South Asian Times, "The organizations who have worked with us are very, very happy." The number of congratulatory messages received from the grantees compiled in these pages testify to that. Besides the funds received to run their projects, many are grateful to GKF and its trustees for visiting and giving

advice and course corrections to improve their functioning.

Looking ahead

Where does GKF go from here? Replies Mukund, "From single digits in 2008, the number of grantees was over 70 in 2023. And these were both in India and the US. Almost all growth has been organic - we receive funding applications, and some align well with our priorities and val-

ues, so the number of grantees increases. I expect the assets of the Foundation to grow, and the number of grantees will also grow. We are always looking for new and worthy causes to support."

(See Mukund Padmanabhan Interview on page 44)

Contact for Guru Krupa Foundation Inc:
info@guru-krupa.org

Congratulations

Guru Krupa Foundation & Mukund Padmanabhan

Thanks to Guru Krupa Foundation's unwavering commitment to the acquisition of knowledge and generosity, the Hindu American Foundation has been able to make significant strides in promoting more accurate representations of India and Hindu Dharmas in K-12 education across the United States. Educational resources unencumbered by inaccuracies have empowered countless students to gain a more authentic understanding of India's rich cultural heritage and the depth of Hindu traditions.

This recognition is a testament to the profound impact of Guru Krupa Foundation's work in shaping a more informed and inclusive educational landscape. Mukund Padmanabhan, may your efforts continue to illuminate minds and bridge cultural gaps for generations to come.



Hindu American Foundation

Religion News Service & Religion News Foundation

Congratulate

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Year 2024**

Under the visionary leadership of its founder **Mr. Mukund Padmanabhan**, Guru Krupa Foundation has funded coverage of Hindus and Hinduism in Religion News Service (RNS) since 2021. RNS is the only secular media outlet that consistently publishes stories about Hindus and Hinduism. The Foundation's support allows RNS to guide non-Hindu readers' exploration of the faith, while giving Hindus a place to share their experiences alongside other faiths.



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RNS

Religion News Service

rns.org

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Mukund Padmanabhan has a soft spot for supporting education opportunities for underprivileged children. So why has he given large sums to his alma maters, the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), and IIT Kharagpur?

He explains his rationale to The South Asian Times: "I came to the US as a graduate student on a full scholarship, without which I would not have been able to study here. As a foreign student entirely dependent on financial aid to survive, when money got tight, things sometimes got a little tense. On the other hand, Indian students who come here to study generally thrive and make good contributions to society. So, guided by my personal experience, I wanted to make it easier for those students.

"Thus was born GKF's 'Higher education' focus, which sets up Fellowships at institutions of higher learning to make it easier for well-qualified Indian students to come here. We have set up these fellowships at UCLA, SUNY Stony Brook, and Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory." The last two are on Long Island in New York.

Mukund argues that higher education and scientific research lead to inventions and innovations that benefit humanity in many ways. Though such institutions receive ample government support, these days, private institutional funding also plays a major role in their operations. The growth and impact of an institution depends on the quality of the faculty, students, and infrastructure, which in turn depends on the funds they can raise.

Paying back to his alma maters

Mukund Padmanabhan shares some details of his beneficence for UCLA and IIT Kharagpur

"I benefited greatly from my education at UCLA and would like to give something back. The growth and profile of the school also indirectly benefit all alumni. Consequently, when UCLA was looking to expand the Samueli Engineering School, they reached out to alumni to sponsor parts of the new Engineering VI building, and I sponsored one of the labs there. Similarly, on the advice of the Dean of the Engineering School, I established a couple of endowed faculty chairs there," says Mukund.

The Dean's message to the SATimes attests to the breadth of Mukund's support for UCLA's engineering school.

At the Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur, Mukund names The Academy of Classical and Folk Arts (ACFA) as a major project he is funding.

Undergrads at the IITs are typically required to take some required credits in areas other than their main concentration. In the past, the only option for these credits were avenues like NCC (National Credit Corps), but a few years ago the Indian government added options such as classical Indian arts immersion to satisfy these credits. ACFA, inaugurated in 2020, addressed this need,



The Systems Scaling Technology Laboratory at UCLA was instituted with support from Mukund Padmanabhan.

and is growing in popularity. Now they get topnotch names in music and other arts to give classes here. Guru Krupa Foundation's beneficence has included the formation of a music auditorium with good acoustics, administration of folk arts workshops, and the engagement of teaching Fellows.

ACFA is off the main track. On the main track, Mukund initiated a project to support IIT KGP students who opt to go abroad for the required summer internships in their third and fourth years. The IIT KGP Foundation vets the students who apply for funds to go abroad. He sponsors about 15 students yearly, and another 10 are supported by other KGP alumni here in the US.

Indian media reported in 2022 that a generous donation from IIT-KGP alumnus Mukund Padmanabhan will boost the Nehru

Hall Ka Tempo Modernization project. His contribution is renovating, refurbishing, and modernizing all the rooms in the D-Top West Wing of the Nehru Hall residential block. The report quoted Mukund as saying, "I'm proud to be a graduate of IIT KGP and have fond memories of my stay in Nehru Hall, a feeling shared by all my wingmates from that time. On behalf of the Nehru D-Top West batch 1987, I felicitate our juniors and wish them the best of success going forward."

The love between alumni and their alma maters runs both ways. Mukund Padmanabhan deservedly received the Distinguished Alumnus Award from IIT Kharagpur in 2021 and a Professional Achievement Award from the Samueli School of Engineering and Applied Science at UCLA in 2019.



MESSAGES

UCLA Samueli School of Engineering

Ah-Hyung 'Alissa' Park

Ronald and Valerie Sugar Dean
UCLA Samueli School of Engineering, Los Angeles



We are grateful for the generosity of Mukund Padmanabhan and the Guru Krupa Foundation. With wide-ranging support for students through scholarships and fellowships, innovative research through the establishment of endowed faculty chairs, and continued expansion through capital contributions, the impact of his philanthropy is felt across the entirety of the school.

The Academy of Classical and Folk Arts - IIT KGP

ACFA Team, IIT Kharagpur

The Academy of Classical and Folk Arts (ACFA) at IIT Kharagpur is grateful to the Guru Krupa Foundation, USA, and its President, Mukund Padmanabhan, PhD, for their continued support since the academy's inception in 2020. Thanks to their generous support, ACFA has been able to conduct lectures regularly, invited lectures/performances, and workshops by eminent musicians and artists through the years, as well as conducting regular classes in music and fine arts for the campus community comprising students, employees, and their family members. This contributes to the holistic development of students, focusing on fostering critical thinking, creativity, and ethical values while encouraging

physical well-being, emotional resilience, and interpersonal skills.

The GKF Research Fellows scheme supports seed funding for research ideas at the intersection of music/arts and science/technology. Dr. Padmanabhan takes a special interest in our activities and continu-

ously offers us constructive feedback and ideas. In the initial phase, GKF also supported the setting up of two modern classrooms with state-of-the-art acoustics that are loved by the students and visitors. We sincerely thank GKF and look forward to our continued association.



The music auditorium of IIT Kharagpur's Academy of Classical and Folk Arts (ACFA) has been supported by the Guru Krupa Foundation. (Photo courtesy ACFA)

Indo American Festivals New York Inc.

Organizers of Ganesh Mohatsav, Roslyn and Dusherra Festival
at Lido Beach, Long Island, New York

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Best wishes



Indo American Festivals New York Inc.

501 c (Non For Profit)

Suman Sharma
(President)

Dr. Ravindra Goyal
(Chairman)



Dear Readers of the South Asian Times,

I want to take this time to wish all of you a prosperous and happy New Year. As we enter 2025, I hope we can learn and grow from our past experiences and meet all upcoming opportunities and challenges with enthusiasm and diligence.

I also want to extend my heartfelt congratulations to the Guru Krupa Foundation for being named The South Asian Times' Organization of the Year. This charitable foundation's unwavering commitment to philanthropy has made a significant impact through the distribution of annual grants that support Education, Healthcare, Elder Homes,

and other empowering programs. The organization's generosity exemplifies the spirit of giving that I believe makes the Nassau County community so special.

May this year bring all of you joy and success. God bless you all, and God bless the United States of America.

Sincerely,

Bruce Blakeman
Nassau County Executive

JOSEPH SALADINO
SUPERVISOR



OFFICE OF THE TOWN SUPERVISOR
54 AUDREY AVENUE
OYSTER BAY, NEW YORK 11771
516-624-6350

December 20, 2024



Dear Mr. Padmanabhan and the esteemed members of the Guru Krupa Foundation,

On behalf of the Town of Oyster Bay, I am honored to recognize and congratulate the Guru Krupa Foundation on being named *The South Asian Times - Organization of the Year 2024*. This prestigious accolade is a testament to your unwavering commitment to philanthropy and your outstanding contributions to society.

Since its inception in 2008, the Guru Krupa Foundation has served as a beacon of hope and generosity. Through substantial annual grants, you have enriched the lives of countless individuals by supporting education, healthcare, elder care, and empowerment initiatives. Your dedication to improving communities both here in the United States and in India exemplifies the true spirit of global citizenship.

The visionary leadership of your founder, Mr. Mukund Padmanabhan, deserves special commendation. A

proud alumnus of IIT-Kharagpur and UCLA, Mr. Padmanabhan has seamlessly blended academic excellence with a deep sense of compassion. His work with Renaissance Technologies and his quiet yet impactful philanthropy stand as an inspiration to all.

As we usher in the New Year, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the Guru Krupa Foundation for its invaluable contributions to our community. May the year 2025 bring you continued success in your noble endeavors, and may your generosity continue to inspire others to make a difference in the world. Wishing you a joyous and prosperous New Year.

Yours truly,

Joseph Saladino
Town Supervisor

Happy New Year

2025

Heartiest congratulations to

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Kavita & Mohan Wanchoo

ECI MW HOLDING COMPANY, INC.

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By SATimes



Man with a Midas touch and a heart of gold

Education brought Mukund Padmanabhan from a middle-class family in Chennai to America and to a position where he could afford to donate large sums of money to worthy causes. He believes education can open the doors of opportunity for the poor and underprivileged, and that is where most of his giving is directed.

Sharing his life story with The South Asian Times, Mukund says, "Education has been important in my family; my father, uncles, and paternal grandfather were all engineers. Consequently, I inherited a value system prioritizing education, hard work, and ethics. I studied hard and got into IIT Kharagpur, earning a Bachelor's in Electronics and Electrical Communication." Then, he came to the US for higher studies.

Mukund's is a well-traversed path by many enterprising youths in India. However, not everyone obtains a PhD in Electrical Engineering from UCLA (University of California Los Angeles) as he did.

After UCLA, he worked at the IBM T.J. Watson Research Lab in Yorktown, New York, managing the Advanced Telephony Speech Algorithms group. He points out IBM Research is a pseudo-academic institution doing blue-sky research that increases scientific understanding and its application to the real world. Reminisces Mukund, "I fit in perfectly and made career progress at IBM. However, after a decade there, work started to become routine. It was then that I got an opportunity to try something new."

And a whoa opportunity it turned out to be! In Mukund's telling, "I've always been a bit of a risk-taker, and the professional environment, people, and work at Ren-

naissance Technologies, a New York hedge fund, seemed very interesting, so I made the transition. I'm still working there after over two decades as a partner and researcher."

That pivot to Wall Street started making him enough money to float and fund the Guru Krupa Foundation, which may not have been possible if he had remained in engineering.

However, not many people who amass wealth start charitable foundations. So, what was Mukund's motivation? He replies, "I have done reasonably well in life and am grateful for my circumstances. So, I feel I can afford to give something back to the society where I've thrived."

He also credits his heritage: "My value system is derived from Hinduism, which my family handed me down. It emphasizes the importance of education, hard work, ethics, charity, empathy, and spirituality. One interpretation of these values is that an individual is merely an insignificant member of a society, and his/her moral values should guide them towards making that society better, once their basic needs are met."

Professional achievements

Running GKF since 2008 may outshine his professional achievements, which, too, are formidable. Mukund has published over 80 technical papers in international journals, presented at conferences, and been granted over 20 US patents.

He received the Professional Achievement Award from the UCLA Samueli School of Engineering and the Distinguished Alumnus Award from IIT Kharagpur, his alma mater in the US and India, respectively. He is also a recipient of the IEEE's (Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers) Signal Processing Society Senior Award.

Mukund has been a trustee of the Hindu Temple Society of North America (Ganesh



Mukund Padmanabhan visits the GKF-funded projects in India and the US to review progress and give advice and helpful suggestions to beneficiary organizations. This picture is from his visit in 2023 to Sevalaya, near Chennai, which provides free education to underprivileged children.

Mukund Padmanabhan

Channeling his success into philanthropy

With degrees from IIT Kharagpur and UCLA, Mukund Padmanabhan earned professional eminence. Then, his researcher's brain earned him success at a hedge fund, which he channels into the Guru Krupa Foundation.



Mukund Padmanabhan was presented the Distinguished Alumnus Award by the Director of IIT Kharagpur at a felicitation at the Indian Consulate in New York in July 2022.

Temple in Flushing) and the Long Island Children's Museum. He currently serves on the Dean's Executive Board at UCLA Engineering.

Praise by grantees and associates

Giving money to a charity is fine, but ensuring the donation is properly utilized is also important. Mukund has evolved systems to do due diligence on the grants that GKF makes. His grantees say that Mukund personally visits the far-flung projects in India and the US. GKF trustee Deepak Nayak said, "The most important thing about Mukund is not the amount of money he gives but the time he devotes to GKF."

S. Madhavan, the former CEO of India-based Cognizant Foundation, tells The SA Times, "Mukund is very methodical and meticulous, whether he evaluates proposals

at the application stage or reviews the progress of projects in the field. I have accompanied him on some project review visits in India. He offers beneficiary organizations thoughtful advice and helpful suggestions, identifying him and GKF as partners (not just donors) in their mission to serve society."

Robert Lemle, co-founder of Long Island Children's Museum, agrees. "Mukund has been a true partner to us. He met our staff and trustees, asking thoughtful questions and learning about our decision process that brings our values to life. When he joined our Board, he brought insight and wisdom that strengthened our work."

Sesshadri Srinivasan, Managing Trustee of Sri Poorna Mahameru Trust in Chennai, admires GKF's transparent functioning. "They do their due diligence while respecting our autonomy, which speaks to their trust in us and their strong values."

Mohan Wanchoo, an entrepreneur-turned-philanthropist whose New York fundraisers for Ekal Vidyalaya and Sankara Eye Foundation have been supported by Mukund, calls him an exemplary role model. "His altruism, channeled through the GKF, is helping to make our world a better place, one good deed at a time," he says, complimenting his personality: "Despite doing and accomplishing so much, he is humble and soft-spoken with a mild demeanor."

Dr. Jayshree Vencatesan, Managing Trustee of Care Earth Trust in Chennai, shares similar sentiments: "Sri Padmanabhan is a quintessential Chennaite - top academic credentials and a highly successful career dotted with achievements of global impact, yet he remains a simple, unassuming, and grounded individual who is determined to do good to others."

Mukund Padmanabhan is a man with a Midas touch and a heart of gold.

(All photos courtesy: GKF)

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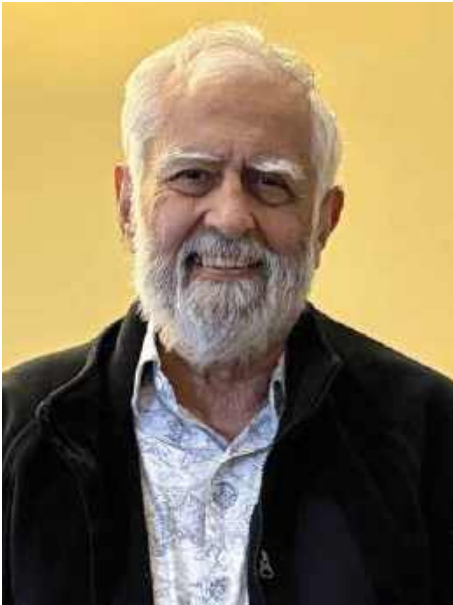
GURU KRUPA
Foundation Inc

In Guru Krupa We Trust

Two long-term Trustees of the Guru Krupa Foundation recount their association with it and Mukund Padmanabhan's central role in expanding GKF's footprint in India and the US.

GKF represents an excellent example of good governance

Lalit Bahl GKF Trustee



I've known Mukund Padmanabhan for about 30 years and have been associated with GKF since its inception. Guru Krupa Foundation was his creation. When it started, it was an informal organization with only a few grantees.

Mukund has done a great job of formalizing its operations, including the due diligence process for evaluating grant applications. With feedback from the Trustees, the organization has continued to grow. It is most impressive that we now have over 70 grantees, and they span both India and the US.

The Trustees Board also receives regular updates on the organization's status. I believe GKF now represents an excellent example of good governance, from vetting the grants to monitoring them and all the administrative work, which is carried out seamlessly.

Most importantly, the organization continues to do noble work, helping those who need it most, promoting knowledge acquisition, and preserving heritage. I can confidently say that it has been my privilege to serve on GKF's Board, and I hope we can keep the good work going for many more years to come.

Lalit Bahl, Formerly with IBM and Renaissance Technologies, New York

Lalit Bahl earned his B. Tech in Electrical Communication Engineering from IIT Kharagpur and his PhD in Electrical Engineering from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.

After his PhD, he joined the IBM TJ Watson Research Center in New York, where he worked for 30 years.

Lalit retired from IBM as Manager of the Speech Recognition Group.

During his career, Lalit has published over 80 technical papers in scientific journals and conferences and been awarded 37 patents.

He was elected to the IBM Academy of Technology and is a Life Fellow of the IEEE (Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers). He has

received the IEEE Signal Processing Society Senior Award twice and the IEEE Information Theory Society Golden Jubilee Award. He was also elected a Distinguished Alumnus of IIT Kharagpur.

After retiring from IBM, Lalit embarked on a second career at Renaissance Technologies, a hedge fund. There, he worked for two decades before retiring as a Senior Researcher.

Lalit is also a philanthropist and has made major contributions to the SUNY Stony Brook Medical School for cancer research and his alma mater, the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. He also serves on the Board of Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory and has been one of the Trustees of the Guru Krupa Foundation since its inception.

The time Mukund gives to GKF is more important than \$\$\$ he gives

Deepak Nayak
GKF Trustee and Vice President



college. At the Institute for Helping the Disabled, also in Bhubaneswar, GKF has created a physical therapy center. We also support Jyoti Kala Mandir to teach Odissi dance to poor girls and instill in them self-esteem and confidence. For Grassroots India in Cuttack, GKF's grant provides vocational training to poor teenage girls from villages.

I also oversee a couple of GKF-supported projects at UCLA.

In Silicon Valley, many people have lots of money but don't want to give it away. The most important thing about Mukund is not the amount of money he gives but the time he devotes to GKF. He travels to visit projects in different places and spends all weekends on GKF work, thus sacrificing part of his life. You can always cut a check for a charity but working two hours in a soup kitchen is a different feeling altogether.

Deepak Nayak, Engineering Manager, Consumer Hardware, Google, Mountain View, CA

Deepak Nayak was born in a village in Odisha (earlier Orissa), India. He obtained his engineering degree from IIT Kharagpur. He moved to the US in 1983 and completed an MS and PhD in Electrical Engineering at UCLA. He also earned an MBA from UC Berkeley. He has 130 patents and publications to his name.

Deepak has worked in Silicon Valley's high-tech industries for over 30 years, blending management and engineering

excellence to cover the semiconductor, solar, LED, and consumer hardware markets.

Deepak is currently at Google. Before Google, he worked at Intel and AMD.

Deepak is passionate about helping poor and disadvantaged people by providing good education, better economic opportunities, and progressive political and social changes. As part of his charity work, he was an early leader of Asha for Education, Los Angeles chapter.

He has been a Member of the Guru Krupa Foundation's Board of Trustees and Vice President since 2010.

He lives in Union City in the Bay Area.

Long before the Guru Krupa Foundation was established, a few friends working at IBM pooled as little as \$400 each, and I used to send the collection to support village schools in Odisha, my home state. Mukund Padmanabhan, my junior at IIT Kharagpur, was part of our group. Later, he moved to New York and founded GKF. I have been supporting his work since 2010.

GKF has funded half a dozen projects in Odisha over the last few years, on my recommendation. We choose those projects over which we will have some control. I spend one or two days at each place to monitor their progress.

For Adruta Children Home in Bhubaneswar, GKF has built the Bolangir Center building and supports its operation, covering hundreds of orphans. Here, a child is fully supported till he or she graduates from



GKF Trustee Deepak Nayak visited Grassroots India project in Odisha. (Photos courtesy: GKF)



Happy New Year 2025!



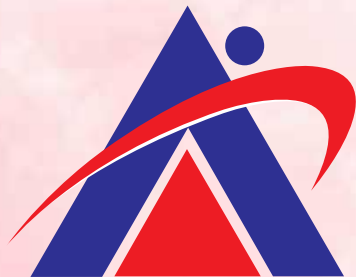
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GURU KRUPA
Foundation Inc

In Guru Krupa We Trust

One Trustee and Grant Manager of the Guru Krupa Foundation recount their association with it and Mukund Padmanabhan's central role in expanding GKF's footprint in India and the US.

At GKF, Mukund Padmanabhan does everything by the book

Amit Maitra GKF Trustee



All GKF Trustees, including Mukund, are engineers, so the efficiency of the grantees' projects is very important to us - the proposals' intent should be matched to the

best extent possible in the final outcome. For any GKF project approval, we have made it a requirement that, in most situations, at least one of us should be able to visit the project.

Mukund does his utmost to ensure everything is done by the book - all the

Amit Maitra, Principal - Research Dept, Nvidia, Santa Clara, CA

Amit Maitra is an internet technologist who develops high-availability networking solutions for high-performance computing (HPC) data centers for Machine Learning. He holds a leadership position at Nvidia and has worked with HP, Cisco, and Intel.

Earlier in his career, Amit was instrumental in developing core routing platforms that formed the backbone of the internet infrastructure in its early growth phase. He has been instrumental in various innovations in the data networking

laws and bylaws in America and India are followed.

The exceptionally qualified trustees of GKF bring diverse, well-formulated life experiences that make my association with the foundation personally informative and fulfilling.

On my own, too, I support some smaller projects that focus on educating and empowering the less privileged, mainly in India but also in America.

domain, innovating networking technologies from core IP routing to metro ethernet solutions. He also created power management solutions for x86 mobile processors and was part of the core team that developed the widely used USB standard.

Amit has also innovated around scaling the wireless infrastructure, including streaming real-time content over cellular networks. This was employed in a live telecast and streaming of the 2011 Cricket World Cup in India, which the Men in Blue won.

Amit was born in Kolkata, grew up in Bombay, and lives in Cupertino, California.

GKF inspires by transforming the lives of the underprivileged

Adithi Menon

Grants Manager with GKF



I have worked at the Guru Krupa Foundation for the past four years. It is an inspiring organization dedicated to making a lasting and meaningful change in the lives of countless underprivileged and underrepresented individuals in the US and India.

As Grants Manager, I have the privilege of working directly with the founder, Mukund Padmanabhan, to ensure funds are used to address critical needs and drive positive change. The Foundation's commitment to transparency and impact is commendable as Mukund takes a holistic, personal, and strategic approach to grant-making.

I am excited to continue working with the Foundation and look forward to contributing to its continued growth and success.

Adithi Menon, Nonprofit Professional, Toronto

Adithi Menon is a seasoned nonprofit professional with over 17 years of experience in grant writing and management, communications, and business development. Her passion for positively impacting the world drives her work in building partnerships, fostering collaboration, and achieving impactful results.

Adithi has extensive experience in grant management. As a part-time Grants Manager at the Guru Krupa Foundation, she is crucial in managing all aspects of grant monitoring. Her meticulous attention to detail and strong organizational skills ensure funds are appropriately utilized.

As a skilled grant writer and consultant, Adithi has secured significant funding for grassroots and international nonprofit organizations like A Future for Every Child and Save the Children Australia. A talented communicator, Adithi excels at developing compelling proposals and crafting engaging content for various platforms to raise awareness and build strong donor relationships.

Beyond her professional accomplishments, Adithi is a foodie who enjoys traveling and hanging out with her husband and two sons.

Thank You!

Mukund Padmanabhan

GKF Founder

I want to take this opportunity to thank my fellow Board members, Amit, Deepak, and Lalit, for their hard work.

Inspiration may be a fine starting point, but it takes much guidance and help to shape a successfully functioning organization.

My fellow Board members have provided this guidance throughout the process, and they have guided and informed our current operating procedures and priorities.

Not just that aspect, but their involvement has also been essential in monitoring the projects that function in their respective hometowns.

All of them are highly successful people with ongoing full careers, and for them to take time out of their busy schedules to serve on GKF's Board is truly creditable, and I am more than grateful.

Last but not least, I want to thank



our Grants Manager, Adithi, for keeping things humming year-round. Without her organizational skills and follow-ups, we would operate much less efficiently.

GKF has been fortunate to provide solace and support to thousands of people in India and the US. With the continued help, involvement, and hard work of our Board members and staff, I earnestly hope that we can extend that support to many more thousands.



Mukund Padmanabhan with trustees Amit Maitra (2nd from left) and Deepak Nayak (extreme right), and friends.

Happy New Year 2025

Warmest and most heartfelt congratulations to

GURU KRUPA FOUNDATION

AND

SHRI MUKUND PADMANABHAN

on receiving the prestigious recognition as

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Helping the needy, promoting learning, preserving heritage

Higher Education

Our understanding of the physical world in which we live is constantly evolving. The desire to "understand nature, and the natural laws that govern it, a little bit better than we do today", is a never-ending quest. This quest for knowledge is best nurtured in higher study programs in the halls of academia and research think tanks.

These institutions play pivotal roles in cultivating ideas, expounding theories and driving innovation. Collaboration and critical thinking are celebrated, building on the work of previous changemakers.

Projects in this category seek to fuel the next generation of thinkers by funding scholarships and fellowships at well recognized universities and research institutions.



The Guru Krupa Foundation (GKF) is a private foundation incorporated in the State of New York. The purpose of the foundation is to fund several charitable causes. Our principles and philosophy, derived from the value system of Hinduism, may be succinctly summarized as:

- Help those who are less fortunate than yourself.
- Support causes related to the acquisition of knowledge (both materialistic and non-materialistic).
- Preserve the heritage and knowledge that has already been acquired.

Guru Krupa Foundation Wishes the Readers of The South Asian Times a Happy, Healthy, and Prosperous 2025.



Social Welfare

The standard of living today varies, by several orders of magnitude, between the most and least fortunate of people, and there are many people for whom even basic material needs are not met. Consequently, there is no shortage of vulnerable and disadvantaged people on earth, who suffer, seemingly for no fault of their own.

Our Social Welfare mandate attempts to address these issues by investing in organizations that run a variety of initiatives from providing access to education, nutritious food and healthcare, to supporting at-risk populations, and providing essential resources. Our goals are to improve the lives of these people and give them the tools to break out of the cycle of poverty they live in.

Projects in this category include providing food and shelter to vulnerable populations (orphanages, old age homes); increasing children's access to education; improving the educational environment; empowering women & children; improving rural health outcomes; and, generally, uplifting disadvantaged communities.



Spirituality, Arts and Culture

This category addresses the non-materialistic aspects of human life and its power to nourish, inspire & uplift the human spirit. Spirituality inspires a bigger-picture perspective of the world and gives us a sense of group identity. Further, spirituality, arts and culture are intertwined. Artistic forms of expression have been used to illustrate spirituality and culture for millennia and are inextricably intertwined.

Several religions have arisen and evolved over the millennia - of these Hinduism is one of the most ancient. The vast amount of knowledge acquired over several millennia is codified in its scriptures, religious practices and culture. These aspects, though, inevitably undergo a slow transformation as cultures merge and attitudes and priorities change in society. There is thus the risk that the roots of the religion may be forgotten with time and lost to posterity. Our goal is to remember and preserve these roots, while at the same time promoting cultural integration and co-existence with other viewpoints.

Projects in this category include support for ashrams/patashalas and temples, programs that raise awareness of India's traditional art forms & culture, and organizations that are focused on promoting interfaith dialogue.



Environmental

This category addresses the preservation of the environment we live in. The environment encompasses all living and non-living things. The Earth sustains us and provides for us, and it is our duty to nurture it for our sake and for the sake of future generations.

Our goal is to fulfill our responsibility by taking care of the environment we live in.

Projects in this category empower local communities and are centered around clean water management, reforestation & activities that preserve or reintroduce lost flora & fauna to habitats.





Congratulations and Commendations

Welcoming The South Asian Times' recognition of Guru Krupa Foundation as the Organization of the Year 2024, messages pour in from charities and organizations it supports in India and the US, as well as admirers of GKF and its low-profile founder, Mukund Padmanabhan.



Ranjani Saigal

Executive Director, Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation of USA

Guru Krupa Foundation deserves recognition as Organization of the Year from The South Asian Times. We are immensely grateful for the foundation's unwavering support of Ekal Vidyalaya, which serves over 100,000 remote rural and tribal villages in India.

GKF's generosity has enabled education for over 15,000 tribal children and supported holistic development initiatives for a population of 15,000 in rural Telangana. These include women's skill training, health services, farming advance-

Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation of USA



GKF's support to Ekal has enabled the education of disadvantaged children and supported holistic development initiatives.

ments, and digital literacy programs.

GKF Founder Mukund Padmanabhan exemplifies compassion and humility. His selfless dedication reflects the spirit of the bhajan Vaishnava Jana-to, embodying service without ego.

Mukund's inspirational philanthropy has profoundly impacted countless lives, making him a true force for good in uplifting the underprivileged. We are proud to partner with the Guru Krupa Foundation in creating lasting change in rural India.

South Asian Council for Social Services

Sudha Acharya

Executive Director, South Asian Council for Social Services, Flushing, NY

On behalf of everyone at the South Asian Council for Social Services (SACSS), I would like to extend our heartfelt congratulations to Mukund Padmanabhan, Founder and President of the Guru Krupa Foundation on this honor. His unwavering support and dedication to our mission have made an immeasurable impact over the years. It is because of people like him that we continue to grow and serve so many people with crucial services that they need.

Once again, congratulations on this well-deserved recognition, and thank you, Mukund, for being such an important part of our community.



SACSS Executive Director Sudha Acharya and New York Senator John Liu honored Mukund Padmanabhan on behalf of GKF.

Flushing Town Hall

Ellen Kodadek

Executive & Artistic Director Flushing Town Hall, NY

Guru Krupa Foundation has generously supported Flushing Town Hall for six years. We are grateful for their commitment

to our programs for local audiences and families, including our annual Diwali Festival, Holi celebration, and Global Mashup concerts. Their support of our mission to present global arts that engage and educate New York's diverse audiences allows us to foster strong and caring communities.

The Foundation's humanitarian work directly reflects its founder Mukund Padmanabhan, whose humble and generous nature is an inspiration and gift to all.



Mukund Padmanabhan was an honored guest at the Flushing Town Hall gala in 2023.

Religion News Foundation

Deborah Caldwell

Religion News Foundation CEO
Religion News Service
Publisher, Columbia, MO



Thanks to GKF support, Richa Karmarkar covers Hinduism and the Hindu community for Religion News Service.

Religion News Foundation congratulates the Guru Krupa Foundation for receiving this prestigious honor from The South Asian Times. Under the visionary leadership of Mukund Padmanabhan, GKF has funded the coverage by Religion News Service (RNS) of Hindus and Hinduism since 2021 and the hiring of Richa Karmarkar in 2023 to cover this beat.

Says Richa: "Writing about the Hindu-American diaspora has been nothing short of joyful. It is a privilege to cover one's community, and especially to keep learning about the multifaceted Hindu faith. Thanks to GKF, I will continue increasing awareness about Hindus, especially as the Hindu community makes inroads into American life."

RNS is the only secular media

outlet that consistently publishes stories about Hindus and Hinduism. Through GKF's support, RNS has guided non-Hindu readers' exploration of the faith, while giving Hindus a place to share their experiences alongside other faiths. This support has also helped RNS fulfill its mission of increasing religious literacy among our readers and in the broader news environment.

Akshaya Patra Foundation USA

Ankita Narula

Vice President, Akshaya Patra Foundation USA, Fremont, CA



GKF has supported Akshaya Patra's Tri-State chapter. Akshaya Patra's mission is to eradicate classroom hunger in India.

The Akshaya Patra Foundation extends its deepest gratitude to the Guru Krupa Foundation for their exceptional leadership and steadfast commitment to transforming lives. GKF's visionary support has been a cornerstone of our mission to eradicate classroom hunger, enabling us to serve millions of hot, nutritious meals to underprivileged children across India.

During the pandemic, GKF's unwavering support was pivotal in Akshaya Patra's ability to deliver over 220 million meals to migrant workers and vulnerable communities. Their timely contributions ensured that food reached those most in need, showcasing their profound compassion and dedication to impactful philanthropy.

Mukund, the visionary founder of GKF, has also been an unwavering supporter of Akshaya Patra's Tri-State chapter. The Akshaya Patra Foundation is honored to collaborate with Guru Krupa on this transformative journey. Together, we are creating a brighter, hunger-free future for generations.

Happy New Year!

2025

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‘Helping the needy feels more like a duty rather than charity’

Mukund Padmanabhan opens up about helping Guru Krupa Foundation in an exclusive interview for *The South Asian Times’ Organization of the Year* cover feature.

By Parveen Chopra

Reticent, reclusive, spartan, self-effacing. Such adjectives come to mind when you interact with Mukund Padmanabhan. You can find commoner epithets from scanning his bio: industrious, brainy, accomplished, and moneyed man. To him what is important is adding his mite to mitigating misery and creating a better world.

Guru Krupa Foundation (GKF), which he set up with the money he made after pivoting from engineering to a hedge fund, Renaissance Technologies, has silently helped scores of institutions and charities for almost two decades. Through its grants and support programs, which are in partnership with reputed organizations, it has transformed many lives. It has given substantial grants to preserve and promote Vedic wisdom, education, old age homes, and enhancement programs.

In an interview with *The South Asian Times*, Mukund discusses his belief system and running GKF, which has given him purpose and a mission to which he dedicates himself.

Excerpts from the interview:

Q The South Asian Times: Which GKF donation has given you the most satisfaction?

A Mukund Padmanabhan: Difficult to pick one or the other. The only reason we give grants is because we believe they are worthwhile causes. Yet, I’d say helping the impoverished people gets the most bang for the buck because, for them, it’s a difference between not having a future and opening the door to a future. That is where it feels more like a duty rather than charity. Just to be able to do that is a great thing.

Q Which projects you have funded made the most difference?

A The ones in the social category. I have a soft spot for kids, especially poor kids. Helping the disabled who cannot lead independent lives is equally important. Anything that reduces misery - particularly extreme misery - is worth doing.

Q Which have been your biggest grants?

A Dollar-wise, the biggest grants are in the US because making a difference here takes a lot of dollars. The biggest grant so far has been to my alma mater, UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles). Over many years, it has run to a few million. I first set up a UCLA grant to support research scholars because I had experienced financial difficulty as a graduate student there. Subsequently my

support expanded to faculty support and capital contributions.

UCLA is a public university with significant government support, but private institutional and alumni support is beginning to play a significant role in public universities. Universities are always happy to get the support of their alumni, and it gives satisfaction to the alumni to do something for their alma mater.

A major project I have at IIT Kharagpur has been supporting the Academy of Classical and Folk Arts since its inception.

Q Sometimes you reach out to institutions rather than them reaching out to you...

A Yes, some religious causes fall into this category. I belong to a particular sect, an ashram, and helping them is more of a duty than an option. I would ask them, “What do you need?”

Q Which ashram do you belong to?

A My family belongs to Andavan Ashramam in Srirangam in Tamil Nadu. There is also a huge temple with which many other organizations are aligned. Ours is the Vishishta Advaita tradition, a subcategory of Vedanta propagated by Ramanujacharya.

Q Do you visit the projects you fund in India?

A Yes, I do, particularly the ones around Chennai, my home town, and New York, where I live. Other GKF trustees visit projects in their respective hometowns.

I like visiting these projects because it gives me a first-hand view of the project and its needs and suggests synergies that can be exploited with other grantees. Many organizations support education for kids. They do things slightly differently, but each one has the same end goal.

However, traveling to grantee projects can be time-consuming if they are spread out. Consequently, I try to keep projects as local as possible. Many projects are concentrated around Chennai, India, and New York City, USA.

Organizations are also happy to see the donor visit and take a real interest in their work and mission. It’s not like I have a foundation, I need to give some money away and then forget about it. So, for us to take an interest and ask questions appears to be pleasing to almost all our grantees. Because whichever project I visit, being detail-oriented, I ask a lot of questions. I probe and push them, and they seem to like it.



Visiting book distribution at Brooklyn Book Bodega in Brooklyn, NY.

“ We should be proud of our lineage and should preserve our traditions. There is value in our traditions. It has good principles, such as “live and let live”, “look out for others and be of service to them”, “expand your priorities to much more than materialistic acquisitions”, and so on ”



Q Do organizations live up to their promises?

A Most organizations do what they promised to do with the money we gave. Only occasionally do we have problems. We did find an integrity problem with a couple of grantees. They sent us photoshopped pictures as part of their progress reports, but we found out and stopped supporting them. I would say that most grantees are not like that.

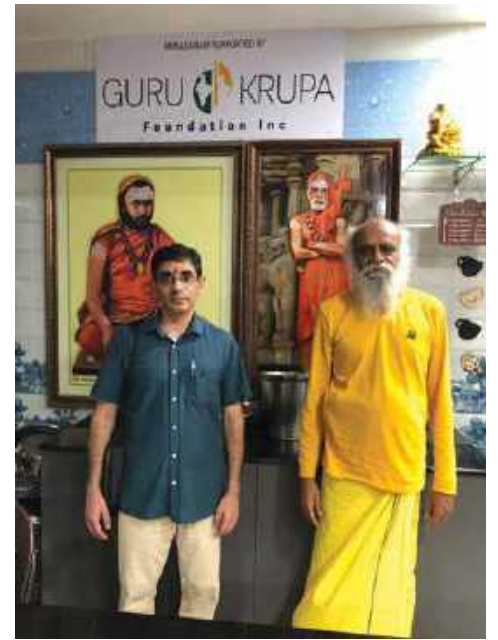
Q You have supported Hinduism-linked institutions as well as secular ones. How do you view Hindutva?

A My interpretation of Hindutva is perhaps more middle-of-the-road. The Sanskrit word means "the quality of being Hindu" - which could be interpreted as referring to the cultural and spiritual practices that are associated with Hinduism, and which form the roots of the Hindu religion. These days, unfortunately, there is a tendency among Indian origin youth to discard our roots because it's not cool in modern life, especially when they are outside India.

America is the most powerful country in the world, and people from all over want to come here. America is a potpourri of cultures from all over, and we, as Americans, have also evolved an American culture that is an amalgamation of several cultures.

However, there is no reason for us to discard our roots and the long lineage we come from - American culture can co-exist with them.

We should be proud of our lineage and should preserve our traditions. There is value in our traditions. It has good principles, such as "live and let live", "look out for others and be of service to them", "expand your priorities to much more than materialistic acquisitions", and so on. Each one of us exists on earth for only a few decades, and



Mukund Padmanabhan visiting (clockwise from top left) Seva Chakkara Samajam, an orphanage; Sri Poorna Mahameru Trust, an old age home; and Anandam, which provides supplementary education to children - all in Chennai.

we have no idea what happens afterward. What is certain is that we cannot take our materialistic acquisitions with us, so let that not be the sole focus of our life on earth.

As much as Hindutva seeks to preserve these ideas and values, there is certainly a place for it, especially in Hindustan, which, as the name suggests, is the home of the Hindus.

“ The fact is that most recent material advancements have happened in the West. The success of Indian-origin people on the global stage today is because they have accepted these advancements, worked hard to build on them, and contributed to advancing the state of the field. That is how you make progress and do well in society ”



Mukund Padmanabhan indulging in his pastime pleasure of reading.

Q But isn't the pendulum swinging back? People like you who have done well in America are proud of their Indian identity. The Indian diaspora everywhere has flourished, and people are seeking meaning in their roots and taking pride in their traditions.

A These days, there are many examples of Indian accomplishments. Just think: Sundar Pichai, the CEO of the biggest search company on earth, is an Indian. Incidentally, he is also an IIT Kharagpur graduate - just saying. We are proud of many people like him who came from India and have succeeded here. But we should not forget where we came from.

You don't discard your grandparents, right? They give you so much love when you are young, you thrive with their attention and their love. Our heritage is grandparents raised to the power of n. We want to make

sure that our knowledge base and our traditions are preserved. But at the same time, you have to be practical. You can't sit in an ashram and meditate or live on past glories and hope to survive.

We have to compete on the global stage today as well. So, you must keep one foot here and one foot there. So that is what I do.

Q Indian civilization is many millennia old. Has that background contributed to the success of Indians abroad?

A Yes, I believe it has. The main reason is the emphasis that Indian civilization places on learning and education. You have to study - your parents force you to do it. If you value education, the doors to success will open. It doesn't mean you get success, but the doors open.

(Continued on page 46>>)



(←Continued from page 45)

Our civilization also emphasizes the value of humility, hard work and ethics - all these attitudes have contributed to our success on the global stage. Notwithstanding the many stories that are out there about the phenomenal feats and advancements of ancient India, they are not quite relevant today. The fact is that most recent material advancements have happened in the West. The success of Indian-origin people on the global stage today is because they have accepted these advancements, worked hard to build on them, and contributed to advancing the state of the field. That is how you make progress and do well in society.

Q You have many patents and technical papers to your credit...

A Patents I earned are in a variety of areas. I used to work at IBM's TJ Watson Research Center in Yorktown Heights, Westchester, NY. My area of work was speech recognition - developing various algorithms to convert speech to text. My patents are mostly related to that area, but they do span sub-fields or

different types of methods to get the job done.

Big royalties? No. If you are working for a company and you file for a patent, the company owns the patent and gets the royalties.

The papers are based on my PhD research in circuits and signal processing and proceed to speech recognition, which I was working on at IBM. Signal processing involves techniques and methods that remove noise from a signal, such as wireless signals received and sent on your phone. Speech recognition involves the computer (or phone) automatically transcribing your speech into text.

Q Any pastimes?

A I enjoy reading books in various genres, including fantasy, adventure, science fiction, and humor. I am also learning Sanskrit, taking a weekend online class conducted by



Mukund Padmanabhan received the Professional Achievement award from UCLA in 2019.



Mukund being honored at Flushing Town Hall gala in 2022.

a teacher at Samskrita Bharati, a charity I support. I watch movies and enjoy listening to music, especially Hindi film music, not necessarily classical.

Q But through GKF you have supported classical music and Indian arts.

A Yes, culture is one of our focus areas. So, what if I have no talent whatsoever in arts and music - I still enjoy them. If arts and culture decay and are forgotten, life may go on, but as they say, all the things worth living for would be gone. Hence, we would like to ensure that our cultural concepts are preserved and that people are given an incentive to develop them and remember them. But in a multicultural society, we have to coexist

with others. So, we should make other ethnic groups aware of our culture and heritage by portraying it well. Hence, we fund the celebration of festivals such as Diwali and Holi (at Flushing Town Hall and Long Island Children's Museum), attended and enjoyed by many non-Indians. Even some platforms for classical arts in India suffer from a lack of funding, so we support them, too.



Parveen Chopra feels blessed compiling this Organization of the Year 2024 cover feature and thanks GKF founder Mukund Padmanabhan for helping in its production and making necessary pictures and other material freely available. Parveen has started his own nonprofit, ALotusInTheMud.com, a web magazine focused on wellness and spiritual content for all.

A Tribute from Mrs Malti Shah & Mr HK Shah to Guru Krupa Foundation

On behalf of World Vegan Vision, Mrs. Malti Shah and Mr. H.K. Shah, the esteemed Founder and Chairman, proudly congratulate the Guru Krupa Foundation (GKF) and its founder, the extraordinary Mukund Padmanabhan ji, for being honored as the Organization of the Year 2024 by the prestigious The South Asian Times.

This accolade highlights GKF's steadfast commitment to uplifting society through transformative efforts in education, social welfare, and cultural preservation. Mukund Padmanabhan ji's humility and visionary leadership inspire us all, showcasing the profound impact of compassion-driven philanthropy.

On behalf of World Vegan Vision, we deeply value our association with Guru Krupa Foundation and commend its noble mission of serving underprivileged communities with dedication and purpose.





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Happy New Year!



Congratulations and Commendations

Welcoming The South Asian Times' recognition of Guru Krupa Foundation as the Organization of the Year 2024, messages pour in from charities and organizations it supports in India and the US, as well as admirers of GKF and its low-profile founder, Mukund Padmanabhan.

CRY America

Patrick Bocco

Director of Fundraising, CRY (Child Rights And You) America Inc., Braintree, MA

On behalf of CRY's children, we are grateful to Mukund Padmanabhan and the Guru Krupa Foundation for their generous annual donations to Child Rights and You (CRY) America directed towards funding the project Rural Workers Development Society (RWDS) working in 52 villages in Ramanathapuram district of Tamil Nadu. RWDS works to reduce child labor and ensure access to schools for underserved children.



Patrick Bocco of CRY America with Project RWDS children in Ramanathapuram, Tamil Nadu, in 2022.

Mukund is a true Child Rights Champion. His unwavering support to CRY America has impacted thousands of underprivileged children and his ongoing generosity inspires the CRY Staff.

Srijan Dance Center

Abha Bhatnagar Roy

Director, Srijan Dance Centre, NY



Srijan Dance Center is grateful to the Guru Krupa Foundation and Shri Mukund Padmanabhan. His vision and continuous support have given a splendid opportunity to not only the South Asians but all communities. His insights in helping to understand

the importance of Indian culture and its Vedic aspect are remarkable. The foundation's significant contribution to shaping people's lives to bring peace and harmony around us is truly appreciable.

Due to GKF support, school children are introduced to Indian culture very early through Indian



GKF helps Srijan Dance Center introduce school children to Indian culture.

classical dance, folk dances, theatre, and Indian literature. They understand the importance of Indian festivals, which bring families together. It not only helps with overall personality development but also enables children to share thoughts and expressions required to be happy individuals.

Mohan Wanchoo

Chairman, ECI MW Holding Co, Inc, NY Philanthropist



I have known Mukund Padmanabhan ji for over a decade. When I think about him, simple living and high thinking are the qualities that first come to mind.

He has had a very successful career, and a heart of gold when it comes to philanthropy. His benevolent spirit is universal, and his thoughtful mind always seeks to do dharma in every aspect of life.

Mukund ji is an exemplary role model for many. His altruism, channeled through the Guru Krupa Foundation, is helping to make our world a better place, one good deed at a time. Be it Ekal Vidyalaya, Sankara Eye Foundation, his alma mater UCLA, or a myriad of charities in India and America, he has always been the first to open his big heart and support their efforts unequivocally. His love for children and opening vistas of opportunities for underprivileged children can be matched by only a few. Despite doing and accomplishing so much, he is humble and soft-spoken with a mild demeanor.

I commend The South Asian Times for recognizing the Guru Krupa Foundation as the Organization of the Year 2024. Thus, you have honored Mukund ji, a self-effacing man. You have raised the bar, challenging him and others to do more to help humanity.

The world needs many more Mukund Padmanabhans!

Hindu Temple Society of North America



Dr. Uma Mysorekar

President, Hindu Temple Society of North America (Ganesh Temple) Flushing, NY

It is an honor and a privilege to write about Mr. Mukund Padmanabhan. He is a dedicated and

generous devotee of the Ganesh Temple and has served on its Board of Trustees.

Mr. Padmanabhan established the Guru Krupa Foundation in 2008 to help the needy and the less fortunate. The foundation does a remarkable service to humanity by supporting social welfare, spirituality, arts and culture, and education in the US and India.

On behalf of The Hindu Temple Society of North America and my own, I congratulate Mr. Padmanabhan for this well-deserved recognition. I wish him continued success in his goals to serve the needy in the US and India.

Long Island Children's Museum

Robert Lemle

Co-founder and Trustee Long Island Children's Museum, Garden City, NY

I'm thrilled to congratulate Mukund Padmanabhan and the Guru Krupa Foundation (GKF) on being recognized as Organization of the Year by The South Asian Times. For those of us at Long Island Children's Museum (LICM), Mukund has been more than just a supporter — he's been a true partner.

Before GKF got involved, Mukund took the time to get to know us. He met with our staff

and trustees, asking thoughtful questions and learning about our decision-making process, which brings our values to life. His genuine curiosity and dedication were clear from the start.

When Mukund joined our Board of Trustees, he brought insight and wisdom that strengthened our work. His contributions have been invaluable, and we are deeply grateful for his and GKF's ongoing commitment to our mission and the community.

I'm proud to call Mukund a friend and celebrate this well-deserved recognition!



Westbury STEM Partnership students and families with LICM President Erika S. Floreska (extreme right) and GKF's Mukund Padmanabhan. The project provides STEM resources to all first through third-grade students and K-12 special education students in the Westbury School District.

Maureen P. Mangan, LICM's Director of Communications & Marketing, adds:

Guided by the vision of Mukund Padmanabhan to nurture a love of learning, GKF supports many of our key community initiatives, including:

- **Westbury STEM Partnership:** Providing STEM resources to all first through third-grade students and K-12 special education students in the Westbury School District, teacher workshops, and classroom enrichment materials.

- **Together to Kindergarten:** Helping families new to the US public education system prepare their children for kindergarten, guiding preschoolers and their grownups through this important transition.

- **Cultural Festivals:** Supporting LICM's Holi festival, which celebrates diversity and connects cultures by introducing visitors to the festival of colors.

We are grateful for GKF's support and positive impact on our community.

Happy New Year 2025!

Heartiest congratulations to

GURU KRUPA FOUNDATION
AND
SHRI MUKUND PADMANABHAN

*for achieving the well-deserved and
distinguished recognition as*

The South Asian Times
excellence in journalism



With Best Compliments:

**KANCHANA &
JAGADEESAN POOLA**



Congratulations and Commendations

Welcoming The South Asian Times' recognition of Guru Krupa Foundation as the Organization of the Year 2024, messages pour in from charities and organizations it supports in India and the US, as well as admirers of GKF and its low-profile founder, Mukund Padmanabhan.

Social Welfare / Kids Education - USA

Literacy Nassau

Karen Micciche

Executive Director, Literacy Nassau, Wantagh, NY

Since 2012, I have been privileged to be part of Mr Mukund Padmanabhan's and the Guru Krupa Foundation's orbit. What started as a simple response to an article in a local newspaper has blossomed into an incredible partnership spanning over a decade.

GKF has generously funded our Tutor Training Workshops, a robust internship program for adult English Language Learners, the construction of our indoor and outdoor



Mukund Padmanabhan with Karen Micciche at Literacy Nassau's Outdoor Pavilion built with support from GKF.

learning spaces, and a Saturday English Immersion class for immigrant children.

Mr Padmanabhan's commitment to improving society is unparalleled, and like a raindrop in the ocean, its ripple effect reaches far and wide. Through GKF, this unassuming, gentle introvert has touched the lives of thousands of people worldwide. I can think of no one more deserving of this prestigious honor from The South Asian Times.

St. Nicks Alliance

Debra Sue Lorenzen

Director of Youth and Education, St. Nicks Alliance, Brooklyn, NY

Under the leadership and vision of Mr. Mukund Padmanabhan, the Guru Krupa Foundation has generously supported St. Nicks Alliance's BK Story Voyager (BKSVM) since 2019. This unique mobile library and learning center is the flagship of St. Nicks Alliance's School Success model, designed to improve literacy across North Brooklyn.



Our partnership with GKF ensures the BKSVM is on the road year-round, reaching thousands of children during school days, after school,

and community events. With GKF's stellar support, the BKSVM has gifted over 20,000 books to children's home libraries, built an impressive culturally responsive lending collection, and led direct small group instruction for young readers.

Simons Laufer Mathematical Sciences Institute

Tatiana Toro

Director of SLMath & Professor of Mathematics, University of Washington Seattle, WA

The Guru Krupa Foundation has been an invaluable partner to the Simons Laufer Mathematical Sciences Institute (SLMath) in providing children in low-income communities around the US with storybooks with fun and engaging math-



SLMath provides children in low-income communities with storybooks with fun and engaging mathematical themes.

ematical themes. With their caring and generous support, our Mathical Collection Development Awards with School Library Journal have reached 60,000 students at 100 Title I schools since 2023.

We are grateful to GKF for their leadership in making a difference in the lives of young people by encouraging a lifelong appreciation of mathematics in the world around them.

Brooklyn Book Bodega

Rebecca Cohen

Executive Director & Co-founder, Brooklyn Book Bodega, NY

Brooklyn Book Bodega's mission is to increase the number of 100+ book homes for kids 0-18 in NYC because reading is transformative. Research shows the impact of book access on their educational outcomes (they stay in school longer), financial attainment (they have more earning power as adults), and overall health (their socio-emotional health is stronger).



their partnership and generous support, we have hosted two cornerstone programs this year: our monthly Community Days, open to all

New Yorkers, and our caregiver program, which gives low-income families the educational resources they need to develop a book culture at home.

We thank Mukund for recognizing that improving access to books and reading can improve life outcomes, create a passion for learning, and break intergenerational poverty cycles.

Reach Out & Read of Greater NY

Megan Foehr

Senior Development Manager, Institutional Giving Reach Out & Read of Greater NY, New York

Guru Krupa Foundation's generous support of Reach Out & Read of Greater New York's (ROR GNY) Building Connections Begins at Birth (BCBB) program has made a mean-

ingful impact on NYC families. By providing foundational support, GKF has helped new families establish important routines around reading to newborns.

The BCBB program provides free, bilingual, culturally reflective children's books and evidence-based literacy guidance during early pediatric visits. Shared reading in the early years is clinically shown to have

a lasting impact beyond language and early literacy; these moments nourish healthy family bonds that positively impact a child's long-term health outcomes.

GKF's support has enabled ROR GNY to expand our services, bringing the BCBB program to more families across the region - with GKF directly supporting nearly 20,000 children. Through GKF's partnership, we are making a difference where it matters most: at the beginning of every child's story.

City Parks Foundation

Cameron K. Robello

Director, Institutional Giving City Parks Foundation, New York

City Parks Foundation is grateful for Guru Krupa Foundation's support of our Coastal Classroom program in 2024. Thanks to their generosity, over 150 young environ-

mental stewards learned about the importance of their local marine ecosystems with hands-on learning in NYC waterways.

Coastal Classroom helps young explorers investigate their urban waterfronts, learn about environmental science and help develop them as the next generation of

marine and environmental scientists. Guru Krupa's commitment has helped us provide year-round instruction to middle school youth across New York City.

We congratulate the Guru Krupa Foundation on their well-deserved recognition as The South Asian Times' Organization of the Year 2024.

Start Lighthouse

Rina Madhani

Co-Founder & Executive Director, Start Lighthouse Bronx, NY

Guru Krupa Foundation has been a vital supporter of Start Lighthouse since 2023. Their generosity has had a transformative impact on our work. Thanks to their support, we opened our third Literacy Hub at PS 161, providing students with multicultural books that celebrate their identities and introduce them to new perspectives. These resources help build home libraries while fos-



tering a love for reading that resonates within families and creates lifelong connections to literacy.

What sets GKF apart is their commitment to creating real, lasting change. Their belief in the power of education has allowed us to expand our reach and deepen our impact within underserved communities. We're grateful for their partnership and the brighter future they're helping us build for our students.

**Wishing you all a
Happy, Healthy and Prosperous New Year!**

Heartiest Congratulations to

GURU KRUPA FOUNDATION

On being honored as

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With Best Compliments

ANKUR SHAH, CEO



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Congratulations and Commendations

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Social Welfare & Education - India

India Literacy Project



A.L. Rangarajan

Country Manager
India Literacy Project
Chennai

The Guru Krupa Foundation is dedicated to enhancing educational opportunities for children in India. Through a strategic partnership with India Literacy Project (ILP), GKF has significantly impacted thousands of students.

GKF has funded two key ILP initiatives over the past three years:

- **Multi-Dimensional Learning Space (MDLS) Program:** This unique learning framework focuses on reading, experiential science, and social sciences, benefiting over 10,000 students in 27 schools.
- **Hands-on Science and Electronics Education:** In collaboration with the Indian Institute of Technology - Madras (IITM), ILP has brought cutting-edge science and technology to 24,000 students in 18 schools. Students are equipped with innovative science and electronics kits to foster scientific thinking and spark innovation.

GKF's partnership with ILP has ensured that ILP improves learning in government schools and prepares students for the future workforce.

Yoga Gives Back

Kayoko Mitsumatsu

Founder & Executive Director
Yoga Gives Back, Los Angeles, CA

In 2020, as a nonprofit organization seeking funds to empower underserved populations in India, we applied for the Guru Krupa Foundation's grant to support 50 underserved girls in rural India to live in a safe group home with a solid education. We were inspired to learn the diversity and scale of programs the foundation funds with generous grants in India and the USA rooted in the founder's spirituality to serve the underserved and less fortunate.

At Yoga Gives Back, we are grateful for Mr. Mukund Padmanabhan's unwavering commitment to our mission and his generosity in supporting 140 disadvantaged youths in India to achieve college degrees in 2025. GKF deserves the highest humanitarian recognition for its profound impact in today's world, creating a more just and even playing field for all.

ANEW

Sangeetha Alwin

General Manager -
Operations, ANEW, Chennai

Since 1997, ANEW (Association for Non-Traditional Employment for Women) has been a skill-building NGO that empowers less-privileged women. We train and place nearly 1,000 women annually and remain steadfast in our mission: "Educate a woman, empower a family."

Our beneficiaries come from challenging economic backgrounds, often daughters of daily wage earners. These women aspire to improve their lives and lift their families from poverty. With GKF's consistent support, ANEW has provided 350 women with basic IT skills and 150 women with Tally (computerized accounting) training. Today, many of these women are employed in respectable roles such as Admin, HR, and Accounts Executives. Financial independence has not only improved their standard of living but also positively impacted their families and communities.

Grassroots India

Debra A. Pennington

President, Grassroots India
Cuttack, Odisha

Grassroots India works to empower young girls from rural Odisha. We run Hariharanda Vocational Training Center, a residential school for underprivileged girls aged 17-28, and W.I.S.H. Network (Women's Independent Self-Help). Guru Krupa Foundation has consistently

contributed to free housing, food, training, and medical care for hundreds of our girls.

Mukund Padmanabhan's keen listening, asking tough questions, and desire to help have made a strong impression on us. Under him, GKF operates highly professionally, following accounting, law, and reporting processes. However, Sri Padmanabhan's loving attitude, a true reflection of their organization's name, is the most memorable.

Bala Mandir

P. Natarajan

Trustee and Hon. Treasurer
Bala Mandir Kamaraj Trust
Chennai

Congratulations to the Guru Krupa Foundation on being recognized as the Organization of the Year by The South Asian Times newspaper.

We are a 75-year-old organization caring for children facing difficult circumstances. Grants from GKF for the past four years have enabled us to provide nutritious meals and educational aids for 400 children in the school we



Mukund Padmanabhan
visited Bala Mandir.

set up. These children are from economically underprivileged families as well as orphans and destitute from Bala Mandir.

Guru Krupa is keen on reviewing and guiding our work. They have encouraged Bala Mandir to adopt some of the best communication practices, including starting a blog on our website.

RKM Vivekananda Girls Higher Secondary School

Swami Shashishikhananda

Secretary, RKM Vivekananda
Girls School, Chennai

We at Sri Ramakrishna Math Vivekananda Centenary Girls Higher Secondary School thank The South Asian Times and its team for recognizing the Guru Krupa Foundation, which reaches out and helps hundreds and thousands of underprivileged persons.

I am proud of our association with GKF. The foundation sponsors nutritious meals for our 780 students,



which has helped their all-round development and focus in studies. GKF also covers teachers' salaries in subjects like Computer Science, Mathematics and English. This allows us to focus on improving our quality of education. The state government gave us the "Girl Friendly School" Award, and we are acknowledged as a model school in our area.

When Sri Mukund Padmanabhan visited some time ago, our school staff and students thanked him. It was a blissful moment for us.

Sevalaya

V. Muralidharan

Founder & Managing Director
Sevalaya, Chennai, India

Sevalaya provides free education to underprivileged children. We have received grants from the Guru Krupa Foundation every year since 2016. We utilized the funds to provide school uniforms to over 2,000 students.

For the past four years, GKF has also extended support for Sevalaya's skill development courses,



Mukund Padmanabhan and GKF
adviser S. Madhavan (top right)
visited Sevalaya.

es, free to underprivileged rural youth, including school dropouts. These courses

have helped over 500 youths get free training in computers and tailoring. Over 80% of our trainees are gainfully employed, earning the much-needed income to support their families. Now, GKF is also supporting a course to train beauticians.

Interestingly, the funds directed toward uniforms indirectly provided a channel of earning for the tailoring unit students.

Ramakrishna Mission Students Home

Swami Dharmisthananda

Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission
Students Home, Chennai

Guru Krupa Foundation has given Ramakrishna Mission Students Home Residential High School grants for five years to meet staff salaries.

We have 14 teachers and other staff. We educate orphaned and poor students with free food and accommoda-

tion in the gurukula tradition. Most of them are first-generation learners. They come from various parts of Tamil Nadu, belonging to different castes, creeds, and religions.

GKF grants are crucial for us. We thank Sri Mukund Padmanabhan and his team at the foundation for their continuous and magnanimous support of the education of poor and orphaned students.

HAPPY NEW YEAR 2025

Heartiest congratulations to
GURU KRUPA FOUNDATION

On being honored as

The South Asian Times
excellence in journalism



With Best Compliments

Nirmala and Surinder Rametra

Chairman and Founder

Shanti Foundation

USA & India



Congratulations and Commendations

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Rakesh Bhargava

Managing Partner, MangoTree Real Estate Holdings President, World Vegan Vision NY

It fills me with immense joy to congratulate the Guru Krupa Foundation (GKF), founded by the visionary Mukund Padmanabhan, on being recognized as the Organization of the Year 2024 by The South Asian Times. This well-deserved honor is a testament to the foundation's unwavering commit-



ment to uplifting society and creating a lasting impact.

Through its exemplary initiatives, GKF has transformed countless lives, fostering education, healthcare, and cultural preservation. The foundation's dedication to serving underprivileged communities with humility and purpose embodies the spirit of selfless service and inspires us all.

Mukund Padmanabhan is exceptionally modest and humble; meeting him, one would scarcely believe the incredible feats he has accomplished in life. His leadership exemplifies how compassion and strategic philanthropy can unite to make a profound difference. We deeply value and respect our association with GKF and are proud to support its noble mission. May GKF continue to be a beacon of hope and positivity, elevating society with its remarkable contributions.

Sanskrita Bharati USA

Sri Natesa Janakiraman

President, Sanskrita Bharati USA Santa Clara, CA

Sanskrita Bharati USA is a non-profit organization teaching and promoting Sanskrit language in the USA for over 25 years. Many young and old people take SBUSA's classes nationwide, conducted in-person and online. SBUSA also runs a 3-year accredited online program -- Samskritam As a For-

eign Language (SAFL) -- for 8-12 grade students.

Guru Krupa Foundation's grants for the past 10+ years have supported SBUSA activities like family camps, lectures, concerts, workshops, souvenirs, publication of textbooks for SAFL students, books for children, and purchase and upkeep of its office building in Aldie, VA.

We are grateful to GKF and Sri Mukund Padmanabhan for helping Sanskrita Bharati USA in its mission to promote Sanskrit as an everyday language and provide access to its rich knowledge repository.

S. Madhavan

Former CEO, Cognizant Foundation India, Chennai

I met Mukund Padmanabhan during my 2021 visit to the US and have cherished our friendship ever since.

As the CEO of Cognizant Foundation (the CSR arm of the global IT major - Cognizant Technology Solutions), I worked with and supported many NGOs. My close interactions with some of them - whose work I admired and respected - prompted me to refer them to Mukund. He accepted my assistance, and the Guru Krupa Foundation has since provided substantial recurring grants to



credible and deserving NGOs in Tamil Nadu.

Mukund Padmanabhan is a simple and unassuming person. He has a genuine concern for the

underprivileged and a sincere desire to help the needy and the deserving. He is very methodical and meticulous, whether he evaluates proposals at the application stage or reviews the progress of projects in the field. I have accompanied him on some of these project review visits in India. His interactions with beneficiary organizations dur-

ing these visits - offering them thoughtful advice and helpful suggestions - reflect his mindset, which identifies himself and the Guru Krupa Foundation as Partners (and not just as donors) to the beneficiary organizations in their mission to serve the society.

I am delighted that the Guru Krupa Foundation has been chosen as The South Asian Times' Organization of the Year 2024. I extend my heartiest congratulations to Mukund Padmanabhan and Team Guru Krupa on this well-deserved recognition for their exemplary work in the USA and India.

Care Earth Trust

Jayshree Vencatesan

Managing Trustee Care Earth Trust, Chennai

Our mission is 'Biodiversity. People. Conservation.' Our pioneering projects have earned us the Indira Gandhi Paryavaran Puraskaar.

GKF has supported two of our projects: a shallow wetland called

Arasankazhani Anaicut Thangal near Chennai, and a bird sanctuary, Therthan in Ramanathapuram.

These remotely located projects need to work with the local government. The threat of an erratic monsoon and missing deadlines also looms. Mukund Padmanabhan factored these into project monitoring. He supports small yet significant pro-

jects, visits the project sites and does not impose his agenda. His interaction with CET's Das Anna is a cherished memory.

Sri Padmanabhan is a quintessential Chennaite. He has top academic credentials and a career dotted with achievements of global impact. Yet, he remains a simple, unassuming, and grounded individual determined to do good to others.

Wiki Education

Kathleen Crowley

Director of Donor Relations Wiki Education, Chico, CA

It has been an absolute pleasure collaborating with Mukund Padmanabhan to bring Wikipedia editing to college classrooms across the US. Since 2022, the Guru Krupa Foundation has generously supported Wiki Education's Communicating Science initiative. This initiative aims to update and expand the amount of high-quality information in Wikipedia articles covering STEM subjects.



To date, the Guru Krupa Foundation has enabled 2,350 students to learn how to assess existing research, identify what's missing, and write in a way that is accessible to the public reading Wikipedia worldwide.

Mukund's dedication to growing young people's interest in STEM will help ensure that our future in science, technology, engineering, and math looks bright. I'm thankful for Mukund's friendship and thrilled to deepen our partnership to create, acquire, and preserve knowledge for all.

Sri Poorna Mahameru Trust

Sesshadri Srinivasan

Managing Trustee, Sri Poorna Mahameru Trust, Chennai



Mukund Padmanabhan visited Sri Poorna Mahameru Trust project - here seen with Guruprasad (extreme right), Kartik and Sri Sesshadri.

Since 2016, the Guru Krupa Foundation has been a vital supporter of our initiatives, such as renovating our elder home and launching a free food distribution van.

We admire GKF's transparent functioning, led by Mr. Mukund Padmanabhan. They do their due diligence while respecting our autonomy, which speaks to their trust in us and their strong values.

Congratulations to GKF on being named The South Asian Times - Organization of the Year 2024.

Women's Organization for Rural Development

Sivakamavalli Muniyandi

Director, Women's Organization for Rural Development Namakkal District, Tamil Nadu

Women's Organization for Rural Development (WORD) is a 33-year-old organization in Namakkal District, Tamil Nadu, dedicated to empowering women. Since 2019, WORD has been supported by grants from the Guru Krupa Foundation. The organization runs tailoring skill development centers and a garment production unit, empowering women to achieve financial independence.

Key achievements include 600 women empowered, providing them with valuable skills.

- 32% work in textile industries, 49% take home orders, 19% are self-employed.

- They earn from ₹1,20,000 to ₹1,36,000 in a year.

Mrs. S. Gowthami, 31, from Namakkal, exemplifies WORD's success. Thanks to GKF, she learned tailoring skills and secured orders from OTP Tex, boosting her income and confidence. She uses her earnings to educate her girls.

GKF's support has created a ripple effect, demonstrating how empowering women can positively change their lives and communities.

Happy New Year

Very warm and heartiest congratulations to

GURU KRUPA FOUNDATION

AND

Mr. Mukund Padmanabhan

On being honored as

The South Asian Times

excellence in journalism

**Organization
of the
Year 2024**



Let this well-deserved recognition ignite inspiration and drive in every member of the Guru Krupa Foundation, fueling their dedication to continue their extraordinary work, spreading light and hope to countless lives.

With Best Compliments & Warmest Wishes for an Amazing 2025

Nimmi & Kamlesh C. Mehta

J.P. Morgan congratulates

The Guru Krupa Foundation

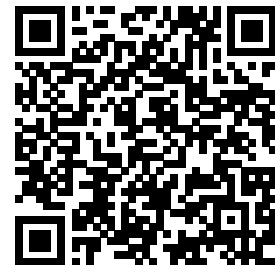
on being named “Organization of the Year” by *The South Asian Times*

This prestigious award is a testament to dedication, commitment and achievement over time. And for almost two decades, the Guru Krupa Foundation (GKF), founded by Mukund Padmanabhan, has helped scores of institutions and charities in the United States and India improve thousands of lives, partnering with reputable organizations and NGOs to effect positive change. We join *The South Asian Times* and those who work for a safer and more prosperous world in celebrating GKF’s “Organization of the Year” award and all that it symbolizes.

Corinne Maloney

Managing Director

corinne.e.maloney@jpmorgan.com



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Person of the Year 2024

India's home to over 3000 deep-tech startups fueled by daring minds and daring money.
Standing ovation to the 'New Age of Indian Deep Tech', Person of the Year 2024.

Like every year there were many contenders

By Navneet Munot

Don is back dodging bullets by the ear. He can claim the year. Criminal convictions? Courtroom speed bumps. Impeachment? Old news. Age? Merely a number. Nothing could stump Trump. MAGA-nimous victory makes Capitol Hill Trump's Red property.

A Lone Musk(eteer) stole the show. Now poised to bull-DOGE government inefficiency with a sharp aXe. Trumpian tower's cab-

inet is a republic of billionaires and hawks. Bye-bye Multilateralism, Buy-buy Mercantilism.

History rhymes. In 1924, Immigration Act imposed immigration quotas while the Revenue Act cut taxes. A slew of acts that decade upheld high protectionist tariffs to boost domestic industry. Sounds familiar in Trump's 'America First'? They risk economic isolation, societal division and reduced global influence - lessons history

repeatedly warned against.

Biden, Kamala and company delivered decent: Infrastructure, growth, jobs, and a mega stock market rally. But couldn't construct a MAGA-grade narrative. In a world where the poor get hand-outs, the rich ride market booms and get bailouts, while the middle class is left out, its frustration is finding a voice.

Yes, what kept us captivated in 2024 is the dance of democracy.

Elections everywhere. Almost. Left-leaning promises, right-wing resurgence, centrist bargains, and everything in between. No matter where you stand, people's voice remains the most unpredictable political force.

Japanese PM Shigeru Ishiba gambled with early elections leading to LDP losing. South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol was impeached after a fleeting flirtation with martial law. In politics, as in life, some gambles are best left unplayed. Argentina, a serial defaulter, delivered a historic fiscal surplus under Javier Milei. Claudia Sheinbaum smashed Mexico's glass ceiling. Prabowo Subianto swept Indonesia.

Tories got torn, Keir Starmer's Labor stormed Downing Street. The UK hopes Rachel can Reevive (pun intended) the economy. The French PM's office borrows a revolving door. Polls served fries to Emmanuel Macron and pastries to Marine Le Pen. Quintessential France: chaos with chic luxury. Georgia Meloni combines graceful charm with calculative balancing.

Olaf Scholz's coalition creaks - political fragmentation, immigration tensions, energy strains and economic pains. The German powerhouse is running with tiring turbines. Ask Volkswagen. Volodymyr Zelenskyy braces as Trump's return threatens funding cuts and potentially cripples Ukraine's fight against Russia. Russia tightened its grip on the mineral-rich and fertile east, while Ukraine faces the colossal task of post-war reconstruction. Krem-

lin critic Alexei Navalny's death in prison cast a dark shadow while Russian influence looms over Georgia's political future. Bashar al-Assad fled Syria. History rewritten after five decades. Mighty support from Iran and Russia fell short. Master strategist Al-Jolani is the man of the moment. Let's hope for lasting peace.

The Red Sea froze, the Middle-East boiled, trade routes turned into troubled waters. Israel's His-high(handed)ness Bibi (Benjamin Netanyahu) is hitting hard on Hezbollah, Hamas, and Houthis heedless of the human toll. International Court of Justice watched helplessly as diplomacy died 365 deaths. Common citizens endured uncommon grief.

A tough year for Iran: prolific leaders lost, proxies pummeled, its prominence receding. Turkey seizing the moment, tightens borders and nudges refugees homeward. It's Recep Tayyip Erdogan vs Netanyahu currently: two strongmen circling the ring, the region still unraveling the ancient tapestry of Arabs, Ottomans and Israelis. Whether dialogue or destruction prevails will define the next chapter in this saga.

China's ageing population and the 3 I's—Inflation, Interest rates, and Imports—signal a slow march toward Japanification. Bears reined in the unpredictable economic jungle until Xi's played his checkers: coercing institutions into stocks, introducing fiscal stimulus, loosening monetary policy, and unveiling a property package. The mix, along with valuation discounts, lured reluctant Bulls into the China shop.

Trump's 'America Only' doctrine nudging Jinping to mend ties globally while doubling down on innovation. Chinese EVs flooded Europe, giving others a run for their power. China-Taiwan conflict? If ever, an internal unrest reaches Xi's doorstep. BRICS expanded beyond core bricks.

Ramlala is back in Ayodhya, rewriting history after five centuries. Narendra Modi is back for the third time, rewriting history after six decades.

What's common between Russia and Ukraine, the US and Iran, Israel and Palestine? India's strategic friendships. A partner to the US and Israel, yet warmth towards Persia, Putin and Palestine. The art of strategic balancing.

India delivered a stern 'Just out' to Justin Trudeau's reps - be mindful when meddling with Modi. Maldives' Mohamed Muizzu mended ties for a \$760 million lifeline. Sheikh Hasina ousted, minorities persecuted, Muhammad



Moin SPM, Co-Founder Agnikul Cosmos, recently gave an insight into the future of Launch Vehicles in India. Deep-tech companies like Agnikul aim for the stars with innovative satellites and start-up swagger. (Photos courtesy: X@ISPA_India/USIBC)

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Yunus inducted: turbulent days in Bangladesh. Recent snapshots capture something: Indian and Chinese soldiers exchanging sweets, S Jaishankar sharing high- Chai in Pakistan, Sri Lankan president visiting Delhi and the Foreign Secretary in Dhaka.

India progresses on PAN (Ports, Airports, Networking) and RRR (Railways, Roads, Renewables). DigitalYatra dazzles. What's the next big act? Social infrastructure ready for its close-up - improving lives systematically for 'Laapataa Ladies' and '12th Fail'. Let's prepare for the Post-AI world reshaping jobs and livelihoods.

Nitish and Naidu deliver NDA (Non Disruptive Assurance). A slew of state elections highlighted: 'All we imagine as light' are Ladki (s) and Behna (s). Social security net for dignified living is laudable. JAM trinity delivers it well. Welfare shouldn't devolve into wholesale revdi giveaways undermining sustainability. NEET stirs a storm. Scars of RGKar hospital cut deep.

We bid TATA to Apro Ratan, the real jewel of India. He was the tallest, literally and figuratively. We remember Narayan Vaghul, the institution builder, Fali Nariman, the legal luminary, Shyam Benegal, fabled filmmaker and Bibek Debroy, the gifted Deb. Maestro Zakir Hussain, Pankaj Udhas, and Ameen Sayani leave a silence that echoes.

Shaktikanta Das, the award-winning central banker, did a balancing act: taming the inflation Elephant while adding Horsepower to growth. Checks on unsecured lending - RBI@90 retains prudence over popularity. Opinions divided on currency interventions curbing volatility - a larger vision of internationalizing the Rupee? Shakti hands over the chariot to Sanjay on a Neutral stand. All eyes on experienced engineer's moves on IIT - INR, Interest rates, and Transitioning the financial sector for future.

The Greatest Indian wedding unfolded at an Anant (infinite) scale. Vistara got AI branding. Quickcommerce impacting Kirana eco-system has wider repercussions. Hindenburg flunked its own KYC—Know Your Content.

India's Atma Nirbharta in capital flows got firmed. SIPs tested on dips. Earnings revival and valuation correction could make foreigners FPI: Fiercely Positive on India. Defense and Railway stocks had a bullet run. Promoters - MNCs, Indians, PE, VC - raked it



From Rio's G20 to Baku's COP, leaders scrambled to 'zero in on Net Zero', while carbon markets and renewables pledges gained steam. (Photo courtesy: X@UNFCCC)

in a record IPO year. Hyundai took a generous slice of the pie. SME IPOs were as hot as Coldplay concerts. F&O traders splurge money on Jane street.

A year of gleaming greenback, soaring S&P, glitzy gold and shining silver. Trump's policy concoction makes it tough for the Fed to feed cheap money. Post Covid lows, my bet on rates has been - 'higher for longer'. The yin and yang of Yen carry trades triggers turbulence. Within EMs, bears bared their claws on Brazil. Oil remained dull. Bitcoin at \$100K is a bubbling bounty for believers and bitter bite for bashers - nothing Cryptic about it. Math-maestro Jim Simons' Medallion minted magic on Wall Street.

Crowdstrike gave a Hard-Macro stroke to Microsoft users. DoJ browses Google's monopoly. Mark's Meta mints billions, Reality Labs still bites. Coach couldn't bag Michael Kors. Roberto Cavalli crafted his final design. UnitedHealth CEO's untimely death spotlighted America's healthcare complexities. Honda-Nissan steering an Accord of love.

Jensen Huang powers GPU (Genius Processing Units!) and fuels AI (Astounding Innovation!). Don't be eNvious, everyone vying to be Nvidia. Masa San is going all-in. GenAI was my person of the year in 2022, and I am more certain, a great transformation is ahead. In the 19th century factories fueled the Industrial era, the 20th brought the Information Age, the 21st belongs to the Intelligence revolution.

Big Tech echoes the imperialism of the Industrial era: monarchs chased land and labor for

resources, tech giants chase our time and attention - the ultimate asset. Imperialist enslaved hands; tech imperialism seeks to capture minds. Stark similarities in strategies too. Two distinctions offer hope it won't go as far: democratic institutions have the power to regulate these empires, and today's tech "monarchs" answerable to many stakeholders, not dynasties.

I reflect on Daniel Kahneman's legacy: Nothing in life is as important as you think it is, while you are thinking about it. Timeless truth.

Incredibly inspiring candidates were Gisèle Pelicot, symbol of enduring hardship with unwavering courage; and Simone Biles, the GOAT Gymnast. I revere these 2 Strees.

Rohit's boys got an 'unforgettable' T-20 victory. Ash won hearts. A historic fable in the medal table for India's Paralympians: more Gold in 2024 than the tally since 1968! Vinesh gains tons of sympathy. Manu Bhaker shot multiple records. India's charming chess champions were a strong contender. Prodigy Gukesh is my hero.

Wow Yusuf Dikeç - Dhichkyaon! Young Jamal netted the Euros. Juan Soto's \$765 million contract is a historic home run. McLaren finally sees the chequered flag. Rafa, the legendary tiger roared: I came, I played, I slammed.

Maggie Smith, taught A-bbe-C of living larger while living longer. RIP, Prof McGonagall. Directors mourn Liam Payne. Nobuyo Oyama, the timeless voice of Doraemon left an indelible mark on a generation's childhood.

Peter Higgs leaves a legacy of God's particles. In 2024, scientific breakthroughs felt like plot twists from the future. From Fusion's spark achieving net energy gain to CRISPR sharpening its gene-editing precision, from successfully cloning of a rhesus monkey to the first functional graphene semiconductor. Neuralink implanted the first brain microchip ushering a new era of brain-computer interface. Google's quantum chip, Willow, solved in minutes what would take supercomputers eons.

Climate change turned up the heat—literally. 2024 broke the record as the hottest year. From Rio's G20 to Baku's COP, leaders scrambled to 'zero in on Net Zero', while carbon markets and renewables pledges gained steam. Mark my message: complacency on climate change is existentially expensive.

I also think the world stands at the cusp of an investment cycle - out of compulsion. A polarizing world bulking up defense budgets and a shift in supply-chains, climate change prompting overhaul of existing systems, and AI adoption rewiring everything. Pager attack sends a reaffirming message for localisation. When disruptions strike, the world rebuilds—bigger, broader, and, hopefully, smarter.

It's in the darkness of existential threats and crippling compulsions that latent talent of mankind transforms into ideas and inventions. India hit its economic nadir in 1991 when it mortgaged gold reserves. In the heat of that embarrassment, an economy of entrepreneurs was born. In its boyhood, we saw the rise of IT services, in its adolescence we saw a wave of

e-commerce in all hues becoming unicorns. As the adolescent comes of age, we now see an early wave of Deep-Tech startups. India's home to over 3000 deep-tech startups fueled by daring minds and daring money. Likes of Agnikul and GalaxEye aim for the stars with innovative satellites and start-up swagger. In the shadows of the advanced Harappan civilization of yore, Tata Electronics is building a semiconductor fab in Dholera. String Bio converting methane into speciality chemicals employing engineered microbes. Pandorum building platforms to manufacture personalised 'homo-chippiens' and human organs on demand. Many will fail, but what will last is the wave of impact, solving challenges and re-defining life.

Indian mathematicians gave mankind the concept of zero - Imagine computing without it. The 'quantum' impact of Indian deep-tech in the years ahead will be a true tribute to Aryabhata.

Standing ovation to the 'New Age of Indian Deep Tech', my Person of the Year 2024. Wish you a great 2025.

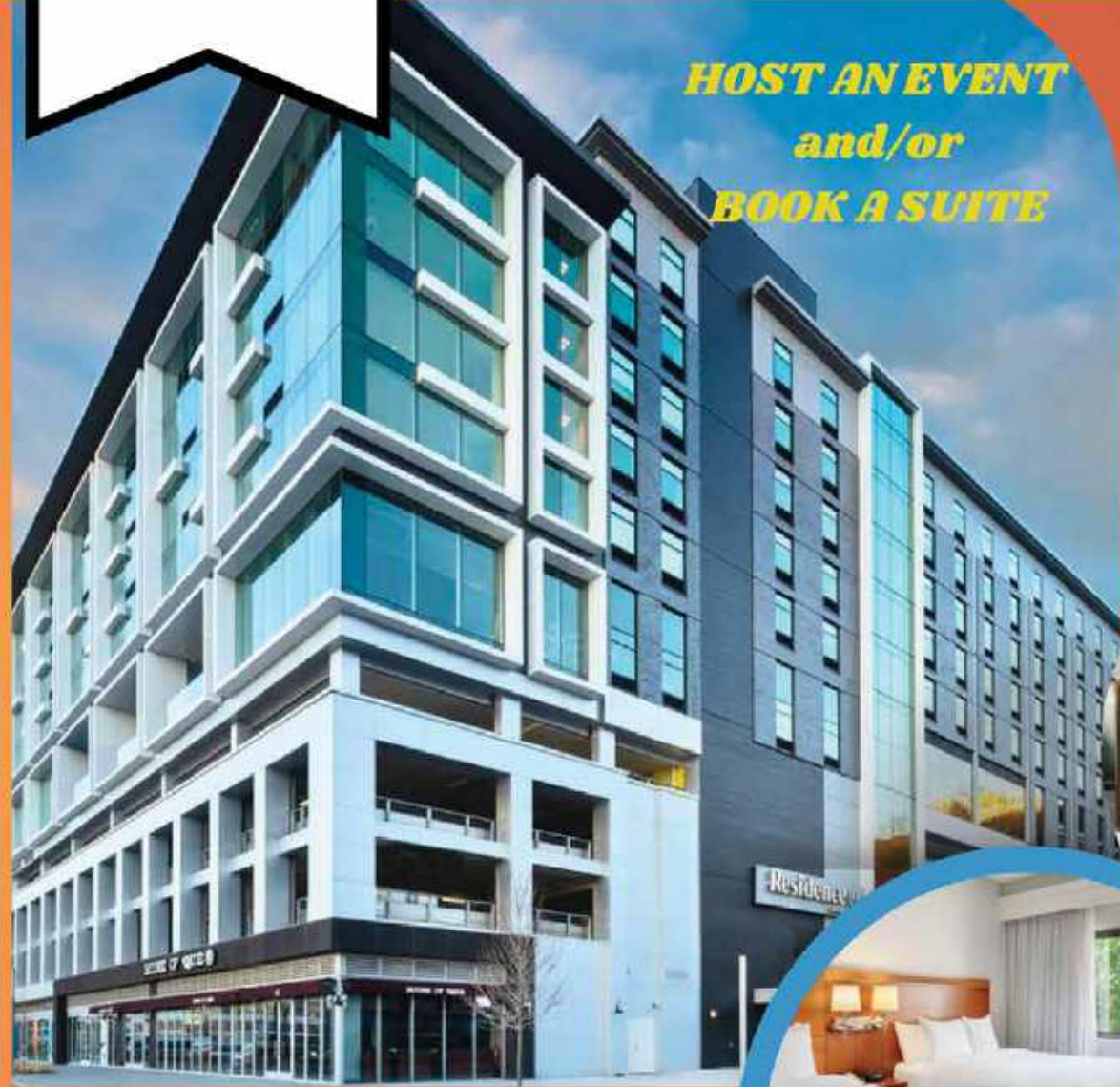


Mr Navneet Munot,
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South Asia: A year of political upheavals

As 2024 draws to a close, South Asia stands at a critical juncture, grappling with a divided political landscape, economic challenges, and escalating security risks. Home to around a quarter of the world's population, the region consists of countries like Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. As the world transitions to 2025, here is a recap of key events that shaped the subcontinent's political landscape...

PAKISTAN | Tackling massive protests and TTP terror

In the Islamic nation, the year began with general elections in February, hailed as the largest in the country's history. On March 3, PML-N's Shehbaz Sharif was re-elected as Pakistan's Prime Minister for a second term, despite former PM Imran Khan's PTI winning the most seats.

Imran Khan and his PTI received a political setback in the very first month of the year when a trial court convicted the former prime minister in the cipher case on January 30. Both were sentenced to 10 years in prison — just days before polls.

A separate trial court found Khan and his wife, Bushra Bibi, guilty in the Toshakhana case and sentenced them to 14 years in prison.

The political landscape was marked by intense protests throughout the year with PTI, along with opposition parties like Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F) and others, organizing mass demonstrations, challenging the election results and demanding the repeal of constitutional amendments, restoration of democracy, and the release of "innocent political prisoners". Tensions flared between protesters and law enforcement, culminating



Pakistan's political landscape was marked by intense protests throughout the year with supporters calling for imprisoned former PM Imran Khan's release. (Photos courtesy: PTI/Facebook)

in clashes, incidents of violence, arrests, and property damage.

In a first, Faiz Hameed, former

head of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), was formally charged in December under the

Pakistan Army Act for land grabbing, seizing valuables from a private housing society, and interfering in political matters.

Tensions flared with Afghanistan in December, with a series of alleged cross-border attacks and retaliatory military strikes. Pakistan has been grappling with rising security concerns as militant groups launch attacks from Afghan territory, particularly targeting Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan.

As for the economy, inflation came down to single digits, policy rates reduced from 22.5 to 15 per cent, foreign exchange reserves improved, and the stock market made record gains.

(Express Tribune inputs)

BANGLADESH | The fall of Hasina government

Bangladesh faced an upheaval this year with the ouster of long-time Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, a development that also cast a shadow over its traditionally strong ties with India. Weeks of protests, led by students over a controversial quota system in government jobs, led to the end of Hasina's 16-year regime in August.

Muhammad Yunus, an 84-year-old Nobel laureate, was favored by the student protestors to lead the interim government. Ever since his coming to power on August 8, there



Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus took over the reins of Bangladesh after PM Sheikh Hasina was ousted in August. (Photos courtesy: Wikimedia Commons)

has been a spate of attacks on minorities, including Hindus. The arrest of a Hindu monk on sedition charges added to India's concerns, which Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri conveyed to Dhaka when he travelled there earlier this month.

Hasina has accused the Yunus-led administration of perpetrating "genocide" and failing to protect minorities, especially Hindus. The interim government has responded with a note verbale, or diplomatic communication, to New Delhi seeking her extradition. The interim

government has claimed that around 3,500 citizens suffered from enforced disappearances throughout Hasina's tenure. More than 200 cases, including that of murder, have been filed against Hasina since her ouster. The Asian Development Bank in December slashed its growth forecast for the country, while the World Bank said half of all non-poor rural households were at risk of falling back into poverty. In 2025, the interim government faces the task of restoring political and economic stability ahead of the general elections, likely to take place at the end of 2025 or the first half of 2026.

NEPAL & MALDIVES | Courting China



India-Maldives relations were back on track after President Mohamed Muizzu met PM Narendra Modi in October.

(Photo courtesy: X@narendramodi)

In Nepal, the multiparty system, marked by unstable alliances and corruption, saw former Prime Minister Puspa Kamal Dahal (Prachanda) ousted in 2024, replaced by Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist (CPN-UML) leader K P Sharma Oli in a coalition government with Nepali Congress. Breaking tradition, Oli prioritized China over India for his first state visit and signed a framework agreement to implement Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects.

As the year began, Nepal stopped issuing permits to its citizens to work in Russia and Ukraine after 10 Nepalis were killed while serving in the Russian Army. Rain-induced floods and landslides wreaked havoc across

Nepal leaving around 200 people dead and many missing in September.

On April 21, Maldivian voters handed a parliamentary supermajority to President Mohamed Muizzu's party, signaling a shift towards China and away from traditional ally India. Muizzu's subsequent visit to China marked a departure from his predecessors' tradition of prioritising India for state visits. However, relations improved by March, with Muizzu affirming India's role as the Maldives' closest ally and requesting debt relief. Positive developments followed, including his attendance at Modi's swearing-in, continued development aid of Rs 400 crore in India's budget, and high-level visits by both sides.

SRI LANKA | A change of guard

In September 2024, Sri Lanka went to polls and saw the Left-wing leader Anura Kumara Dissanayake emerge victorious in the presidential election. After winning, he called for snap elections soon after, where his party Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna-led National People's Power (JVP-NPP) coalition swept the parliamentary elections by winning 159 out of the 225 seats.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) approved the third review of Sri Lanka's \$2.9 billion bailout in November but warned that the economy remains vulnerable.

AFGHANISTAN | In dire need of humanitarian aid

The Taliban regime remains firmly in power despite massive economic challenges, with more than 90 per cent of Afghans struggling with poverty and increasing food insecurity. In 2024, 23.7 million people required humanitarian assistance. Reports show that Afghanistan has the fourth largest number of people facing severe hunger and food shortages and about 80 per cent of families live on less than \$1 per day per person, according to Al Jazeera.

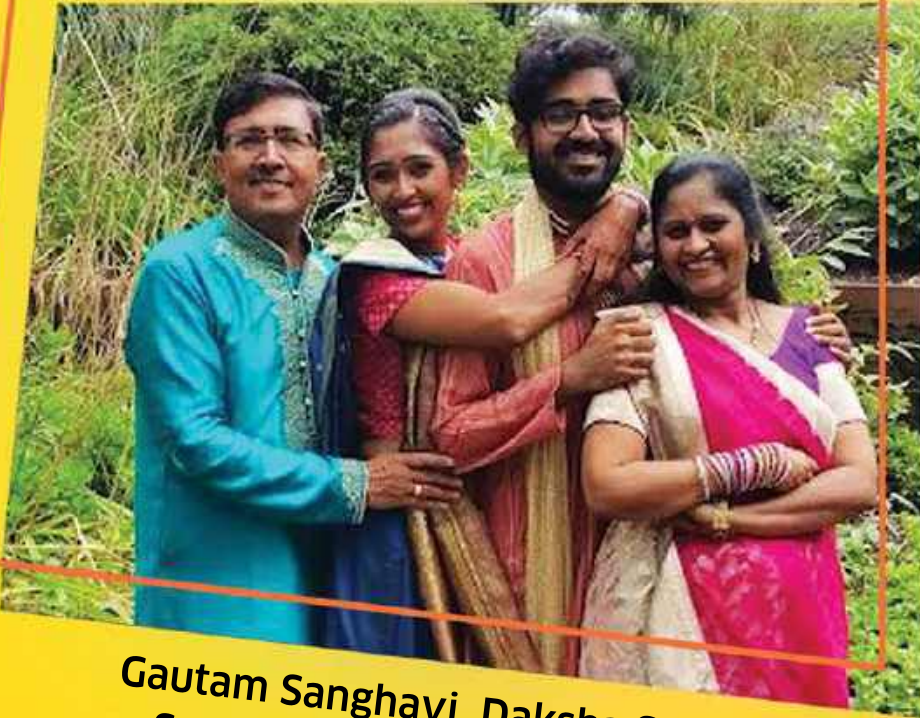
In October 2023, several magnitude 6.3 earthquakes struck Herat province, killing at least 2,000 people and injuring thousands



NPP's Anura Kumara Dissanayake took over as Sri Lankan president. (Photo courtesy: Anura Kumara Dissanayake/Facebook)

more. Uzbekistan Prime Minister Abdulla Aripov became the highest ranking foreign official to visit Afghanistan since the return of the Taliban in 2021. While China and Russia, are intensifying their engagement with the Taliban regime, Pakistan remains frustrated with the Taliban's meager actions against the terrorist group Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). In August, the Taliban issued new laws on vice and virtue severely curtailing women's rights. Towards the end of 2024, Taliban said they will close all national and foreign non-governmental groups in Afghanistan employing women.

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a mouthful of sweetness,
and soulful of brightness**



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A record number of around 26 Indian-origin members of Parliament were elected to the House of Commons in the UK's general election as results were announced in July 2024 handing a landslide victory to the Labour Party after 14 years.

Several Conservatives survived an overall brutal outcome, and notable among them was outgoing Prime Minister Rishi Sunak with a decisive win in his Richmond and Northallerton constituency in Yorkshire. Barrister Suella Braverman won from the newly-cre-

Top Indian Diaspora news to hit the headlines

26 Indian-origin MPs elected to UK Parliament

ated Fareham and Waterlooville constituency. She has represented the people of Fareham since 2015, being re-elected in 2017 and 2019.

While Priti Patel secured a win in Witham in Essex, Goan-origin Claire Coutinho secured a win from East Surrey. Gagan Mohindra held on to his South West Hertfordshire seat for the Conservatives and Shivani Raja registered a gain for the party in the keenly watched constituency of Leicester East where she was contesting against fellow Indian-origin Labour candidate Rajesh Agrawal.

Reflective of the overall election results tally, it was the Labour Party that saw the maximum number of winning Indian diaspora candidates,

starting with party veterans such as Seema Malhotra – who held on to her Feltham and Heston constituency with a comfortable margin.

Valerie Vaz won in Walsall and Bloxwich, Sojan Joseph was elected from Ashford, Sonia Kumar from Dudley, Gurinder Josan from Smethwick, Warinder Juss from Wolverhampton West and Harpreet Uppal was elected from Huddersfield. While Lisa Nandy won with a big margin in Wigan, British Sikh MP Preet Kaur Gill defeated Tory first-timer Ashvir Sangha in Birmingham. Sikh MP Tanmanjeet Singh Dhese won back his seat for Labour in Slough and Navendu Mishra registered a win from Stockport.



Winning Labour candidates (top left): Jas Athwal, Nadia Whittome and Valerie Vaz; winning Conservatives (bottom left): Priti Patel, Gagan Mohindra, Suella Braverman. (Photos courtesy: Facebook/X)

Labour's Nadia Whittome won from Nottingham East, Jas Athwal was elected from Ilford South and Baggy Shankar secured a win from Derby South. For the Liberal

Democrats, who had a good election gaining over 60 seats, Munira Wilson won back her Twickenham constituency.

47 Indians rescued from 'cyber scam centers' in Laos



Indian Ambassador to Laos Prashant Agrawal (center) with the rescued workers. (Photo courtesy: X@IndianEmLaos)

At least 47 Indians who were trapped in 'cyber scam centers', were rescued from Bokeo province in Laos in September 2024. The Indian embassy in the Southeast Asian nation assisted in rescuing 635 Indians from Laos and ensured their safe return home.

The Indians caught in cyber scam centers were within the Golden Triangle Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Bokeo province. Of these, 29 were handed over to the

Embassy by Laos authorities after their crackdown on illegal activities in Golden Triangle SEZ, while other 18 had approached the Embassy in distress, seeking help.

The scammers would impersonate women on dating apps to chat with potential victims. After some time, they would convince the target to invest in cryptocurrency trading. Many were duped in India this way. The "cyber slaves" were deprived of food and rest if they failed to meet their daily targets.

Attacks on Hindu Mandirs in Brampton

In October 2024 the quiet suburban city of Brampton, located just outside of Toronto, Ontario became the epicenter of a disturbing series of attacks on Hindu temples. These attacks, which included vandalism, defacement, and violent protests, sent shockwaves throughout the local and global

Hindu communities. However, the deeper question behind these incidents is not just about isolated acts of hate but about the disturbing rise of anti-Hindu sentiment in Canada, fueled in part by political forces and a lack of accountability at the highest levels of government.

Brampton, home to one of the

10-year-old British Indian outranks Einstein in IQ

Krish Arora, a 10-year-old Indian-British boy from Hounslow in West London, stunned the world by achieving an IQ score of 162, outranking the estimated IQs of Albert Einstein and Stephen Hawking. This score places Krish in the top one per cent of the most intelligent people in the world.

Krish has been accepted into Mensa, a society for highly intelligent individuals. He is also set to join Queen Elizabeth's School, a highly regarded grammar school in the UK. Speaking about his experience with exams, Krish said, "The 11-plus exams were too easy." He expressed excitement about starting at his new school, hoping it will



Krish Arora has been accepted into Mensa, a society for highly intelligent individuals. (Photo courtesy: X@UKinIndia)

provide a better challenge for his abilities. "Primary school is boring. I don't learn anything. All we do is multiplication and write sentences all day. I like to do algebra," he said.

Krish's parents, Mauli and

Nischal, both engineers, first noticed his abilities when he was four-years-old. Mauli, who works in IT firm. At four, he completed an entire math book in three hours. He was doing decimal divisions at the age of four.

At the age of eight, Krish completed a full year's worth of curriculum in a single day.

In addition to his academic achievements, Krish is also an accomplished musician. He has won awards as a pianist and has been inducted into the Hall of Fame by Trinity College of Music after completing four grades in just six months. He currently holds a grade 7 piano certificate.

Street named after Kerala-born doctor in Abu Dhabi

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) named a street in Abu Dhabi in July 2024 after an Indian-origin doctor as part of the "Honoring UAE's Visionaries: Commemorative Streets" project initiated by the Department of Municipalities and Transport (DMT).

The George Matthew Street is located near Sheikh Shakbooth Medical City in Al Mafraq, honoring the 57-year-long service to the UAE's healthcare system.

Arriving in the UAE at the age of 26 in 1967, Dr Matthew started his service as a general practitioner and was affectionately called "Matyous" by the locals. He contributed to the growth of modern



Dr George Matthew contributed to the growth of modern medicine in the UAE. (Photo courtesy: dmt.gov.ae)

medicine in the UAE and held several key positions throughout his career, including Medical Director of Al Ain Region in 1972 and Health Authority Consultant in 2001.

He pursued specialized studies in tropical diseases in England and hospital management at Harvard. He also served as a valuable educator, training healthcare workers and earning the trust of colleagues and the community. His dedication earned him the privilege of serving the royal family, including the late Sheikh Tahnoon bin Mohammed bin Khalifa Al Nahyan. In recognition of his service, the UAE granted Dr Matthew and his family citizenship ten years ago.

Originally from Thumpamon, Pathanamthitta in Kerala, Dr Matthew graduated from Trivandrum Medical College in 1963.

largest Hindu populations in Canada, witnessed multiple attacks on its Hindu temples, with incidents ranging from graffiti, broken windows, and statues being vandalized, to larger-scale violent protests against Hindu religious gatherings.

These acts of desecration have

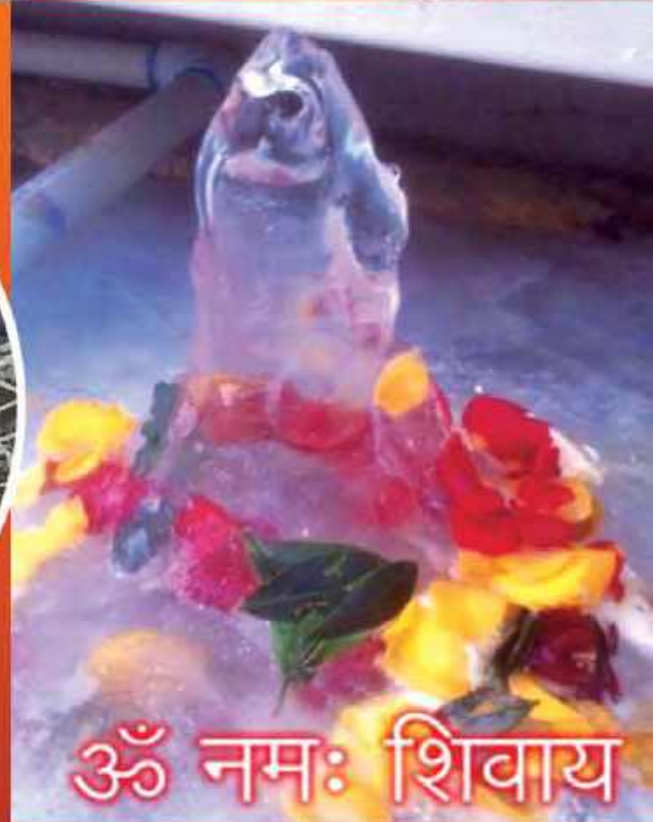
been particularly alarming due to their organized and seemingly coordinated nature. But even more troubling was the apparent lack of immediate and decisive action by the authorities to prevent or punish the perpetrators.

The attacks were widely attributed to radical elements within

the Sikh separatist movement, particularly those pushing for the creation of a Khalistani state. These groups, operating with the support of several foreign entities, have repeatedly targeted Hindu institutions in Canada, Brampton, with its large Indian diaspora, became a focal point for their campaign.



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Following the blockbuster-filled 2023, expectations soared in 2024, but the industry found itself struggling to deliver consistent hits. While some films soared to record-breaking heights, others stumbled, leaving audiences and producers disappointed.

Audiences rejected films that failed to offer compelling narratives, regardless of star power.

The hits and flops of 2024

This year saw the rise of pan-India films, a trend that is starting to redefine the Indian box office and bringing audiences together like never before.

While the first half of the year struggled to produce notable successes, the second half reignited Bollywood's box office fortunes. Leading the charge were crowd-pullers like 'Stree 2', 'Bhool Bhulaiyaa 3', and 'Singham Again', which brought audiences back to theatres.

While 'Stree 2' emerged as the year's biggest hit, raking in Rs 627.02 crore at the box office, Kartik Aaryan's 'Bhool Bhulaiyaa

3' delivered a stellar Rs 278.42 crore. 'Fighter', Hrithik Roshan and Deepika Padukone's aerial action thriller, lived up to the hype, amassing Rs 205.55 crore and 'Singham Again' held its ground, collecting Rs 268.35 crore.

As for the misses, 'Bade Miyan Chote Miyan', one of the year's most expensive productions, failed to create magic due to its poor storytelling and lacklustre execution. Alia Bhatt's much-hyped 'Jigra' became a cautionary tale for filmmakers, grossing Rs 30.69 crore despite claims of box office fraud. Akshay Kumar's per-



Horror-comedies like 'Stree2' and 'Bhool Bhulaiyaa 3' pulled audiences back to theatres. (Photos courtesy: Facebook/Shraddha Kapoor, Kartik Aaryan)

formance in 'Sarfire' was praised, but weak marketing and stiff competition from 'Stree 2' limited its earnings to just Rs 22.13 crore.

South cinema shines



The year 2024 was a big year for South Indian cinema, especially Telugu films. These films not only wowed audiences in their home states, but they also dominated the Hindi-speaking market, frequently exceeding Bollywood's biggest blockbusters and proving that great storytelling transcends language barriers.

Allu Arjun's recently released 'Pushpa 2' was a juggernaut, with the movie collecting Rs 618.50 crore. 'Kalki, 2898 AD', the sci-fi epic starring Prabhas,

Deepika Padukone, Amitabh Bachchan, and Kamal Haasan, grossed Rs 294.25 crore, setting new standards for the genre.

As for Malayalam cinema, 2024 proved to be an eventful year with hits like 'Manjummel Boys' and



Movie stills from 'Manjummel Boys' and 'Pushpa 2'. (Photos courtesy: Allu Arjun, Soubin Shahir/Facebook)

'Aavesham'

to the release of the 300-page Hema Committee report, revealing shocking tales of discrimination, exploitation and sexual harassment of women in the Malayalam film industry.

Impressive B-Town debuts

The year 2024 brought fresh talent to the forefront with compelling performances in films and web series. Superstar Aamir Khan's son, Junaid Khan, stepped into the limelight with 'Maharaj', an ambitious period drama where he played a journalist unravelling corruption in pre-independence India.

In 'Laapataa Ladies', Nitanshi Goel gave an unforgettable performance as a young bride lost in a rural, patriarchal setup. In the same film, Pratibha Ranta's portrayal of the headstrong Jaya trying to make something of her own in a patriarchal world, garnered acclaim.

Rishabh Shawney dared to step into the shoes of an antagonist in the Hrithik Roshan-starrer 'Fighter'. As a formidable villain, he delivered a chilling performance that left audiences in awe. After two



Nitanshi Goel and Junaid Khan impressed viewers with their powerful debuts. (Photos courtesy: Aamir Khan Productions/Facebook, IMDB)

shelved debut films, Lakshya finally made his debut with the actioner 'Kill', giving one of the most impressive debut performances this year.

TV actor Shaheer Sheikh made

his film debut opposite actor Kriti Sanon in her debut production 'Do Patti'. Playing an abusive husband, the actor garnered praise for the credibility he brought to the dark role.

Re-releases save the day



Re-releases like 'Tumbbad' and 'Veer-Zaara' stole the spotlight in 2024 and the trend was primarily a means to sustain business. (Photos courtesy: Shum Shah, Veer-Zara Official/Facebook)

The year 2024 firmly established itself as a milestone for re-releases in Indian cinema, with audiences flocking to theaters to relive the magic of classic films. From evergreen blockbusters like 'Hum

Aapke Hain Koun' and 'Veer-Zaara' to gems like 'Tumbbad', 'Karan Arjun' and 'Laila Majnu', the re-release trend not only rekindled nostalgia but also brought in significant box office earnings.



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New Delhi: The year 2024 has been nothing short of a roller coaster for Indian cricket fans. The pinnacle of 2024 for Indian cricket was undoubtedly the T20 World Cup victory. Hosted jointly by the West Indies and the USA, the tournament marked a special milestone for India as they reclaimed the title after 10 long years.

Under the guidance of head coach Rahul Dravid, the team delivered a stellar performance, silencing critics and making history. Rohit Sharma, the team's seasoned opener, was the second-highest run-scorer, while pacers Arshdeep Singh and Jasprit Bumrah topped the wicket-takers' chart. For Dravid, the victory was particularly poignant, as it came on the same soil where his captaincy saw India knocked out of the 2007 ODI World Cup.

IPL 2024: KKR's resurgence and Pant's comeback

The Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) emerged victorious in IPL 2024, securing their third title under the captaincy of Shreyas Iyer. A balanced squad and standout performances from Sunil Narine, the tournament's leading run-scorer, and Varun Chakaravathy, the highest wicket-taker, were key to their success.

Adding excitement to the cricket calendar was the mega auction for IPL 2025. Rishabh Pant, making a remarkable comeback after a career-threatening car accident, became the most expensive player



Men in Blue won the ICC Men's T20 World Cup in style. (Photo courtesy: X@T20WorldCup)

in IPL history. The Lucknow SuperGiants (LSG) acquired him for an eye-popping Rs 27 crore.

Change in leadership

The end of Rahul Dravid's tenure as head coach saw Gautam Gambhir stepping into the role. Gambhir's appointment was bolstered by KKR's IPL triumph under his mentorship. Meanwhile, on the field, Rohit Sharma's retirement from T20Is opened the door for Suryakumar Yadav to take over as captain. The dynamic batter has since led India to 13 wins out of 17 matches, cementing his leadership credentials.

Women's team win T20I series

The Indian women's cricket team delivered a sensational performance in the final match, defeating the West Indies by 60 runs to clinch the three-match T20I series 2-1. This victory marked a historic milestone, ending a drought of home-series wins that stretched back to October 2019.

The third T20I was a spectacle of dominance and brilliance, headlined by record-breaking performances from Richa Ghosh and Smriti Mandhana. Batting first, India posted a mammoth 217/4 — their highest-ever total in T20Is.

Richa Ghosh was the showstopper of the evening, smashing an electrifying 54 off just 21 balls. Her knock, studded with jaw-dropping sixes and boundaries, equaled the world record for the fastest fifty in women's T20Is. Complementing her fireworks was Smriti Mandhana, whose classy stroke play anchored India's innings and set the stage for their monumental total.

With a daunting target on the board, the West Indies faltered under the pressure, struggling to match India's intensity. The Indian bowlers, backed by sharp fielding, tightened the noose, restricting the visitors and sealing a commanding victory. This series win not only brought joy to Indian cricket fans but also showcased the growing strength and depth of the women's team.



Jay Shah assumed the role of ICC Chairman on December 1. (Photo courtesy: X@ICC)

Farewell to legends

The year also brought farewells to some of cricket's brightest stars. Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli, and Ravindra Jadeja bid adieu to T20Is, while Ravichandran Ashwin retired from international cricket entirely. Globally, icons like David Warner, James Anderson and Tim Southee also hung up their boots in various formats.

Challenges and setbacks

Not all moments in 2024 were celebratory. India suffered an unprecedented whitewash at home in a Test series against New Zealand, losing 3-0. This marked the first time in history that India faced such a defeat in a series of three or more matches on home soil.

Amid the transitions, fresh talent emerged on the international stage. Players like Rajat Patidar, Dhruv Jurel, and Sarfaraz Khan debuted in the red-ball format, while Ramandeep Singh and Sai

Sudharsan showcased their skills in T20Is, hinting at a promising future for Indian cricket.

New ICC chairman

Off the field, Jay Shah assumed the role of ICC Chairman on December 1, adding another feather to India's cricketing cap. One of his first significant announcements was the decision to host the 2025 Champions Trophy in a hybrid format, ensuring logistical flexibility for participating nations.

Resilience and redemption

Rishabh Pant's story has been the year's most inspiring. After a life-threatening car accident, the wicketkeeper-batter not only returned to international cricket but also played a crucial role in India's T20 World Cup campaign. His journey from recovery to becoming IPL's most expensive player (Rs 27 crore) underscores his resilience and determination.



Cricketer Smriti Mandhana. (Photo courtesy: X@mandhana_smriti)



Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) emerged victorious in IPL 2024. (Photo courtesy: X@IPL)



The journey of Indian stamps in 2024

India continued its tradition of issuing commemorative stamps that reflect the country's rich cultural and historical tapestry. This year's stamp releases showcased a vibrant array of themes - from honoring iconic personalities and their contributions to Indian society, to celebrating important national events and milestones. These stamps not only served their postal function but also as valuable collectibles for philatelists and history enthusiasts alike, encapsulating India's enduring heritage in miniature form.

In July this year, the Department of Posts released a commemorative postage stamp to mark the Silver Jubilee of Kargil Vijay Diwas, at Dras in Kargil. Celebrating the 25th anniversary of India's resounding victory in the Kargil War, the stamp pays homage to the unmatched bravery, determination, and sacrifice of Indian armed forces.

In August, Union Ministers Jyotiraditya M Scindia and Mansukh Mandaviya released a set of commemorative postage stamps to celebrate the XXXIII Paris Olympics. The commemorative stamp has been designed to capture the spirit of the Olympics, symbolizing unity among nations through sports and reflecting India's rich sporting heritage.

In the same month, India Post unveiled a commemorative stamp featuring renowned wildlife filmmaker Subbiah Nalla Muthu. It is the first postal stamp cover in India dedicated to a wildlife filmmaker. "The release of this stamp cover featuring me with a tiger is a complete surprise and an incredible honour... This stamp is not just a recognition of my work, but a tribute to the majestic creatures who inhabit our world and the shared responsibility we have to ensure their survival," Muthu told TOI.

In November, President Droupadi Murmu released a commemorative coin and postage stamp on the occasion of 75 years of the Constitution of India at Samvidhan Sadan. The commemorative coin and stamp were dedicated to the 75th anniversary of adoption of the Constitution of India.

In a remarkable celebration of their long-standing diplomatic ties, India and Romania commemorated 75 years of friendship and cooperation with the release of a joint postal stamp on September 17, 2024. This milestone event highlighted the deep and multifaceted relationship between the two nations, symbolizing their shared history, cultural connections, and collaborative efforts across numerous sectors.



(Photo courtesy: Pradip Jain, Philatelic expert) For more details visit: www.philaart.com

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By K S Tomar

A good sense has prevailed in the Pakistan government which has given a go-ahead to its cricket board to accept India's proposal on the Hybrid Model (playing at a neutral venue, UAE, which will act as a big savior to the game of cricket in this country, thereby saving the right to host the Champion Trophy. In simple words -- the game of cricket has won, finally.

It was a clever move on the part of the newly elected ICC (International Cricket Council) chief, Jay Shah, to leave it to the BCCI (Board of Control for Cricket in India) and Pakistan Cricket Board to mutually resolve the ticklish issue which has paid rich dividends as it is official that both nations' cricket teams will clash at a neutral venue. PCB (Pakistan Cricket Board), being financially on a weak footing, could have inflicted serious injury through its suicidal act of boycotting the champion trophy but it has been averted.

The arrangement will cover the Champions Trophy 2025 in Pakistan, next year's Women's Cricket World Cup in India, and the T20 World Cup in 2026, co-hosted by India and Sri Lanka. Citing security concerns, India declined to travel to Pakistan for the Champion Trophy scheduled for February-March. The Indian team has not toured Pakistan since the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks.

Crores of fans in India and Pakistan are elated over ICC's efforts which successfully persuaded the PCB to accept an amicable and logical solution of the Hybrid Model (India will play its matches at neutral venues like UAE or Sri Lanka). There is no denying the fact that cricket fans do not believe in territorial barriers as they are solely interested in the welfare and evolution of the game. Fans want to witness India versus Pakistan cricket matches, which are nicknamed, "virtual emotional war" and guided by feelings of patriotism of respective nations.

Jay Shah's taking over as the new ICC chief, following his successful election, marks a signifi-

Finally, the game of cricket wins

Pakistan's decision to accept the Hybrid Model for hosting the 2025 ICC Champions Trophy reflects a deep understanding of the dynamics shaping international cricket.



Children in Pakistan pose with the ICC Champions Trophy.
(Photo courtesy: Pakistan Cricket Team/Facebook)

cant milestone in cricket governance. Shah's leadership brings fresh opportunities for the ICC, with the potential for transformative changes across global cricket, besides ensuring smooth conduct of the champion trophy which can be attributed to his management skills and vast experience as BCCI Chairman.

Under Shah's leadership, the Champions Trophy will likely regain its status as a marquee ICC event. His ability to create high-stakes tournaments could amplify the competition's significance. Shah's strategies could focus on enhancing fan experiences, from digital engagement to on-ground spectacles. This would ensure the Champions Trophy appeals to both traditional and emerging markets.

The Champions Trophy will benefit from Shah's commercial acumen, attracting top sponsors and record-breaking broadcasting deals. This would make it a financial success, benefiting all participating boards. With Shah at the helm, the tournament can expect seamless organization, from selecting world-class venues to ensuring high-quality facilities for teams and fans. Shah's diplomatic approach could ensure the participation of all ICC member nations, including resolving tensions such as those between India and Pakistan, to preserve the tournament's competitive integrity.

Pakistan's pragmatic move

to safeguard its cricketing future

Against this backdrop, wisdom has finally prevailed within the Pakistan government, which has approved its cricket board's acceptance of India's Hybrid Model proposal. This pragmatic decision serves as a lifeline for cricket in Pakistan, safeguarding the country's hosting rights for the Champions Trophy. Simply put, cricket has emerged victorious in this diplomatic resolution.

PCB's decision to accept the Hybrid Model for hosting the 2025 ICC Champions Trophy marks a significant shift in its stance. This move reflects not just strategic foresight but also a deep understanding of the dynamics shaping international cricket. By stepping back from its earlier boycott threat, the PCB has displayed maturity and pragmatism, ensuring that Pakistan remains a key player in the cricketing world while securing its hosting rights for one of the sport's marquee events.

Hybrid Model: A win-win solution?

Under the hybrid arrangement, matches will be split between Pakistan and a neutral venue, addressing security concerns raised by some teams. This compromise allows Pakistan to host matches domestically, allowing its fans to witness international cricket while ensuring participation from countries hesitant to travel to Pakistan. The PCB's

insistence that this model be applied reciprocally to events held in India until 2031 underscores its bid for fairness in the global cricketing arena. By linking this acceptance to long-term reciprocity, Pakistan is strategically positioning itself to negotiate future arrangements with greater leverage.

Why backing down was necessary

The PCB's initial boycott threat risked isolating Pakistan from the cricketing fraternity, particularly as India holds significant sway in ICC decision-making. Losing the hosting rights would have been a severe blow to Pakistan's cricketing aspirations, depriving the nation of a rare chance to showcase its capabilities as a safe and world-class venue. Financial losses, diminished fan morale, and potential backlash from sponsors would have compounded the damage. Recognizing this, the PCB opted for a middle path that ensures the tournament's success while preserving its hosting privileges.

Ensuring the Trophy stays in Pakistan

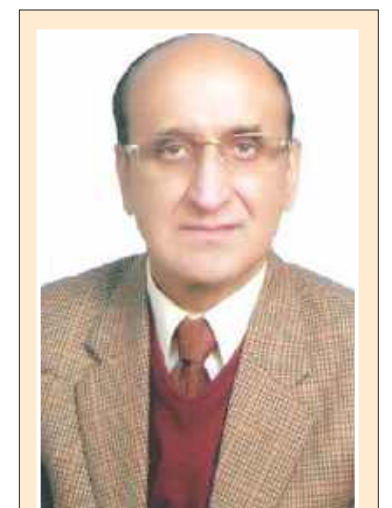
By agreeing to the hybrid model, the PCB has effectively safeguarded the Champions Trophy's presence in Pakistan. This decision ensures that the event proceeds smoothly without the uncertainty of shifting the tournament entirely to another country. It also mitigates poten-

tial fallout with the ICC and other member boards, which might have viewed Pakistan's rigid stance as counterproductive. Moreover, the move aligns with Pakistan's broader strategy to rebuild its image as a reliable host for international cricket. With successful recent tours by teams like Australia and England, Pakistan has demonstrated its capacity to organize high-stakes matches. Hosting part of the Champions Trophy will further cement this narrative.

Broader benefits for Pakistan

Hosting the ICC Champions Trophy in 2025 offers Pakistan a significant financial opportunity. Historically, ICC events generate substantial economic activity, and Pakistan is poised to benefit from direct and indirect revenue streams. For example, ticket sales alone could rake in millions, as the 2017 Champions Trophy in England saw ticket revenues exceeding \$9 million. High-profile matches, particularly involving India or England, are expected to sell out, contributing significantly to the PCB's income. Additional revenues from concessions, merchandise, and parking fees at stadiums are likely to add to the earnings.

In conclusion, hosting the ICC Champions Trophy is not just about cricket — it is a financial windfall for Pakistan. From generating millions in ticket sales and sponsorships to creating thousands of jobs and boosting tourism, the event has the potential to significantly impact the country's economy and global standing. If executed efficiently.



The writer is a strategic affairs columnist and political analyst based in Shimla.



Celebrating the Janm and Nirvan Kalyanak of Lord Parshvanath

To celebrate the auspicious 2,900th Janm Kalyanak and 2,800th Nirvan Kalyanak of Tirthankar Parshvanath Bhagwan, special commemorative postage stamps and coins were released, recognizing his enduring contributions to human welfare and spirituality.

In the historical city of Varanasi, 2900 years ago, King Ashvasen and Queen Vamadevi were blessed with a son in the midnight of Paush Krishna 10/11. The boy child was named Parshva Kumar. In due course, his education started and with sharp intelligence, he was praised by his teachers. He also excelled in horsemanship and weaponry.

Gifted with three types of Gyan (Knowledge) — Mati (sensory knowledge), Shruti (scriptural knowledge), and Avadhi (clairvoyance) since birth, he realized the transitory nature of worldly comforts. Therefore, he decided to embrace asceticism.

On Pausha Krishna Ekadasi, Parshva Kumar, standing under a Ashoka tree in Varanasi, plucked out five fistfuls of his hair, and initiated himself into monkhood. Immediately upon his initiation, he attained the fourth knowledge—Manahpariyaya Gyan (a kind of telepathy).

On the 84th day of his spiritual journey and completing an eight-day fast, he achieved Omniscience (Keval Gyan) and Omniperception

(Keval Darshan) at Varanasi on Chaitra Krishna 4. After attaining omniscience, Lord Parshvanath visited many places and delivered profound religious discourses. His teachings of non violence, truth and self restraint inspired numerous followers for their spiritual upliftment. He explained the essence of dharma and strongly opposed rituals like animal sacrifice and the ostentation prevalent in religious practices at that time and reviving the true essence of Dharma.

As his liberation (moksha) drew near, Parshvanath, along with thirty-three monks, traveled to Mount Sammet Shikhar. There, he undertook a fast until death. After fasting for one month and having completed 100 years of life, he attained liberation on the eighth day of the bright fortnight of Shravana, under the Vishakha constellation.

Lord Parshvanath's teachings left an indelible mark on Jain tradition. Jain devotees consider their lives fulfilled by remembering and venerating Bhagwan Parshvanath daily.

(Text and photograph courtesy: Pradip Jain)



The stamp release event was graced by Karnataka Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot and other distinguished guests.



Birth Place - Varanasi



2900th Janm Kalyanak of Bhagwan Parshvanath

2800th Nirvan Kalyanak of Bhagwan Parshvanath

Stamp & Coin issued on 25th Dec. 2024



Nirvan Place - Sammet Sikhar

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From India to the world: Nita Ambani headlines India Conference at Harvard

The philanthropist and businesswoman will champion India's global influence at one of the most prestigious global platforms.

Boston: The India Conference at Harvard (ICH) announced that Nita Ambani, a trailblazer in philanthropy, education, and culture, will take center stage at the highly anticipated India Conference at Harvard, scheduled for February 15-16, 2025 in Boston.

As one of India's most influential voices, Ambani has profoundly impacted over 80 million lives through her social equity initiatives and continues to advocate for India's global potential. Her recent achievements, including hosting the International Olympic Committee (IOC) session in India after four decades and championing India's bid for the 2036 Olympics, symbolize the nation's growing influence on the global stage. Her keynote aligns perfectly with this year's theme, "From India to the World," which celebrates India's emergence as a global leader shaping pathways for peace, prosperity, and innovation.

Ayush Shukla, one of the Conference Co-Chairs, commented: "The India Conference has always strived to push the boundaries of dialogue around India's growth story. This year's theme 'From India to the World' captures the essence of India's transformative journey—where local ingenuity meets global impact. I think...this theme celebrates not only the success stories of our technological prowess and development growth that have emerged from India, but also showcases the lessons Indians offer about collaborative communities, vibrant culture, resilience, and entrepreneurial spirit."

The India Conference at Harvard is one of the largest and most influential student-led India-focused conferences in the US. An annual event hosted jointly at Harvard Business School and Harvard Kennedy School, it fosters dialogue on India's evolving role in global affairs, bringing together thought leaders, policymakers, entrepreneurs, and cultural icons.



Nita Ambani has profoundly impacted over 80 million lives through her social equity initiatives. (Photo courtesy: ICH)

This year, the conference is chaired by Arpit Garg (HBS 2025), Sanchie Shroff (HBS 2025), Kartik Sahni (HBS, HKS 2025) and Ayush Shukla (HKS 2025) leading a team of 100 students from across Harvard University. The conference will feature 80+ distinguished speakers from diverse fields over two days,

exploring how Indian ideas and innovations are reshaping global

narratives.

Apart from a Fireside Chat with Nita Ambani, showcasing her vision for India's role on the world stage, other highlights of the Conference would include a Policy Hackathon, in collaboration with the Indian School of Business and GDi Partners, addressing climate challenges and financial inclusion in rural India, and a Startup Pitch Competition,

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providing a platform for Indian and Indian-origin entrepreneurs to present innovative solutions to India's unique challenges.

Harvard's association with India has grown stronger over the years, reflecting India's ascent as a global thought leader. This is exemplified by the increasing representation of Indian-origin leaders within the university. Notably, Srikant Datar, Dean of Harvard Business School, Nitin Nohria, former Dean of Harvard Business School and Rakesh Khurana, Dean of Harvard College, have played pivotal roles in shaping Harvard's leadership and academic culture. The conference exemplifies this deep connection, serving as a platform for meaningful discussions on India's transformative journey.

For more details on the India Conference's programming and registration, visit indiaconferenceharvard.com



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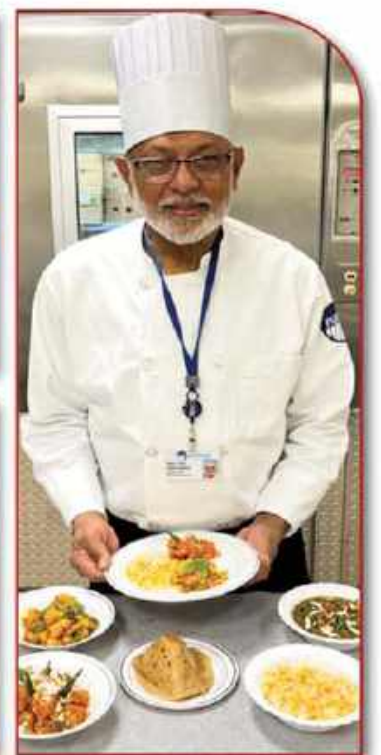


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American Hindus Against Defamation launch groundbreaking AI initiative to detect Hinduphobia

Hindutva, and related issues.

360-Degree Political View: A comprehensive graphical representation of American political candidates from a Hindu perspective, providing insights into their positions, funding, and public statements.

An X (formerly Twitter) Feed Analyzer: An advanced tool to analyze social media content for Hinduphobia patterns and misinformation will soon be available.

Analysis of "Savera" Reports Published

As part of its initiative, AHAD has already utilized the HinduHate Detector to publish a detailed analysis of reports by the "Savera" group on the Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America (VHPA) and the Hindu American Foundation (HAF). This analysis shows that the authors and sponsors of the "Savera" report are highly biased. The use of linguistic nuances, the sources they have referred to, and the overall sentiment of their hatred towards Hindus and mainstream Hindu advocacy organizations should not be considered credible by any serious scholar or other stakeholder.

The profiles feature intends to provide biographical information about academics, researchers, and journalists. The biographies will provide a context for analyzing their published work.

"Since its inception in 1997, AHAD has been at the forefront of combating anti-Hindu defamation in all its forms. With these new AI tools, we are entering a new era of data-driven advocacy, equipping stakeholders with the insights needed to challenge biases and build a more informed dialogue," said Ajay Shah, Convenor of AHAD and the President of the World Hindu Council of America (VHPA).

AHAD invites academicians, journalists, and nonprofit organizations with a proven track record of countering Hindu hatred to collaborate with them and utilize these tools.

An initiative of the World Hindu Council of America (VHPA), AHAD has been actively monitoring mass media, products, public places etc. to ensure the respectful and accurate representation of Hindu dharma, culture, images, and icons. For more information about AHAD and its groundbreaking AI initiatives, visit www.ahadinfo.org.

Raja Krishnamoorthi defends H-1B visa program

Calls it 'essential' for attracting talent to maintain America's competitive advantage

Schaumburg, IL:

Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi (D-IL) backed H-1B visas following days of debate over the program. During an interview with CNN, Congressman Krishnamoorthi said he agrees with President-elect Donald Trump's support for the H-1B high-skilled worker visa program. As the Ranking Member of the Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), Congressman Krishnamoorthi stressed how important it is to American competitiveness to invest in our domestic workforce while also attracting the best talent from around the world.

"I think that this H-1B program is an essential component of maintaining our competitiveness," Congressman Krishnamoorthi said on CNN this morning. "I happen to be the ranking member of the committee charged with trying to win the competition against the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). We can't win that competition



Congressman Krishnamoorthi speaks on the importance of the H-1B visa program.

(Photo provided by Congressman Krishnamoorthi's Office)

unless we retain, attract, and get the very best talent from around the world. That's our number one killer competitive advantage as a country, and so we have to improve that."

Congressman Krishnamoorthi has long been a leader in supporting domestic workforce development, comprehensive immigration reform, and the H-1B visa program. During his tenure in the U.S. House, the Congressman has authored a range of bills to reform high-skilled immigration while repeatedly calling for lifting the cap on the number of H-1B visas to draw even more talent to the American workforce.



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The South Asian Times partners with Nepal's Annapurna Media Network for collaborative news sharing

Mr. Kamlesh C. Mehta, Chairman and Publisher of Forsythe Multimedia Group, LLC. This collaboration represents a strategic milestone in the relationship between the two organizations, aimed at fostering stronger media connections and enhancing their respective global media presence.

Hicksville, NY: In a significant move to strengthen international media collaboration Forsythe Multimedia Group, LLC, the publisher of *The South Asian Times* based in Hicksville, New York has partnered with Annapurna Media Network (AMN), a leading media organization in Nepal to expand its reach in the South Asian community.

This partnership will formalize the exchange and distribution of news content between the two organizations across various media platforms, focusing on positive, motivational, and success-oriented stories that resonate with their audiences. The Memorandum of Understanding to this effect was signed by Mr. Manoj Basnet, General Manager of Annapurna Media Network, and

Under the terms of the MOU, *The South Asian Times* will publish news content provided by Annapurna Media Network across its print and digital platforms, with appropriate attribution given to AMN as the source. In return, Annapurna Media Network will also publish or reproduce content from *The South Asian Times* across its diverse media outlets, including *Annapurna Post* (Nepali daily), *The Annapurna Express* (English daily), *Ap1 Television*, *Radio Annapurna*, and its digital platforms. The content shared between the two organizations will center around positive stories that inspire and inform audiences, covering topics such



as business achievements, social welfare, technological progress, cultural highlights, and human-interest stories.

The primary objective of this partnership is to enhance the reach and visibility of both Annapurna Media Network and Forsythe Multimedia Group, LLC. By sharing content and leveraging their respective platforms, the two organizations aim to connect with broader audiences across South Asia, the United States, and other international markets. The collaboration is designed to enrich the media landscape by provid-

ing readers with diverse and engaging content that not only reflects the interests of the two organizations' audiences but also promotes positive societal change, cultural understanding, and global community building. This partnership is not just about content sharing but also about fostering a constructive relationship within the global media industry.

This Memorandum of Understanding represents the beginning of a promising new chapter for both Annapurna Media Network and Forsythe Multimedia Group, LLC. As the

partnership progresses, both organizations are confident that their shared commitment to high-quality journalism, positive content, and global connectivity will result in a mutually beneficial relationship that will continue to grow and expand across borders.

By leveraging their collective strengths, Forsythe Multimedia Group, LLC and Annapurna Media Network aim to become leading voices in their respective markets, driving forward the global media conversation with content that is both impactful and inspiring. This MOU marks the first step in a long-term collaboration that will provide readers with an enriching news experience while fostering stronger ties between Nepal, the United States, and other international communities. As both organizations look to expand their influence and connect with audiences in new and innovative ways, they are excited about the future of their partnership and the new opportunities it will bring.

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Ohio pioneers Diwali school holiday for Hindu students

"This was the culmination of a lot of work by Hindu advocates here in Ohio and across the country and I was very happy to partner with them to get this passed," Antani said. A day earlier, he amended his bill into HB 173 on the Senate floor. Both chambers subsequently passed the legislation unanimously. The law, effective from 2025, allows every Hindu student in Ohio to celebrate Diwali without academic penalties.



Senator Niraj Antani
(Image courtesy: Niraj Antani/Facebook)

"Ohio is home to millions of unique individuals, each with their background and story," State Representative Adam Mathews said. Mathews was the House sponsor and champion of the bill and represents most of Warren County, where many Cincinnati area Hindus reside.

The Hindu American Foundation has welcomed the passage of the bill. "By officially recognizing Hindu Heritage Month every year, HB 173 goes a long way in ensuring that the contributions, culture and traditions of Hindu Americans are better understood and appreciated by the people of Ohio," said Samir Kalra, HAF managing director.

Washington, DC: Ohio becomes the first state in the US to offer Hindu students a school holiday for Diwali, along with two other Hindu holidays. The legislation, co-sponsored by Senator Niraj Antani, aims to allow Ohio students to observe their faith without academic concerns.

The Ohio State House and Senate have passed a bill to designate October as Hindu Heritage Month. "This is a huge win for Hindus across Ohio and the country. Now, every October, we will be able to officially celebrate our Hindu heritage in Ohio," State Senator Niraj Antani said after the passage of his bill to designate October as Hindu Heritage Month in Ohio.

Antani is the first Hindu and Indian American State Senator in Ohio's history and the youngest Hindu and Indian American state or federal-elected official in the country.

Indian-American techie's family demands FBI probe into death

New York: The mother of Suchir Balaji a former employee at ChatGPT-parent OpenAI who accused the company of violating copyright laws in October and was found dead a month later, has demanded an FBI investigation into his death.

The 26-year-old OpenAI whistleblower and researcher was found dead in his San Francisco apartment in California on November 26. Officials had ruled Balaji's death a suicide.

In a post on X on Sunday, his mother, Poornima Ramarao, said they hired a private investigator and did a second autopsy to throw light on the cause of death.

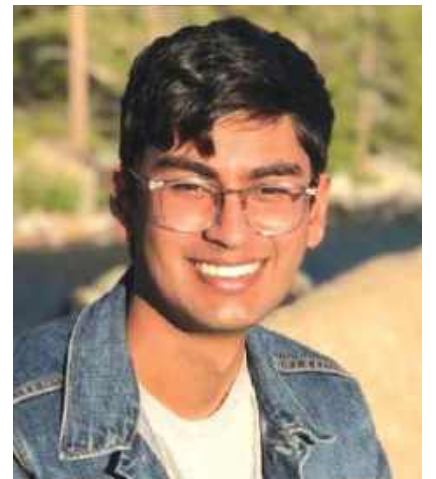
The private autopsy "doesn't confirm" the cause of death stated by police, she said.

Ramarao also alleged that Balaji's apartment - which was reportedly on Buchanan Street - was "ransacked."

"There was a sign of struggle in the bathroom and it looks like someone hit him in the bathroom based on blood spots," she said.

"It's a cold-blooded murder declared by authorities as suicide. Lobbying in SF city doesn't stop us from getting justice," Ramarao said while demanding an FBI probe.

According to media reports, Balaji's father, Balaji Ramamurthy, while



Suchir Balaji, a former employee at ChatGPT-parent OpenAI who accused the company of violating copyright laws, was found dead in his San Francisco apartment in November.

(Photo courtesy: Suchir Balaji/LinkedIn)

speaking at a vigil held for his son in Milpitas, California, said he was the last person to talk to him on November 22. During the 15-minute call, he said they talked about his Los Angeles trip which was part of his birthday celebration.

"He was in LA and having a good time. So he sent us all the pictures," Guardian quoted Mr Ramamurthy as saying. "He was in a good mood."

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New Delhi: A seven-tier security circle has been set up to ensure the safety of more than 40 crore people expected to visit Prayagraj for the Maha Kumbh this month, the Uttar Pradesh government said. According to Republic News, the local authorities have set up temporary police stations and checkpoints in both urban and rural areas, as well as near railway stations, bus terminals, airports, and other key routes.

With preparations for the grand Maha Kumbh in full swing, a sinister bomb threat has sent ripples of concern through security agencies. The threat, issued

on the social media platform X by an account named Nasar Pathan, claimed, "A bomb blast will be done in Maha Kumbh. 1,000 Hindus will be killed."

The security will be further bolstered by the deployment of the Provincial Armed Constabulary, National Disaster Response Force, Central Armed Police Forces, BDD, and AS Check teams. The UP government said in a statement on Sunday that units will be kept in reserve for the city and rural areas.

Prayagraj Police Commissioner Tarun Gaba said 13 temporary police stations and 23 checkpoints are being established for a reinforced security, which will take the number of stations up from 44 to 57. Across urban and rural areas of Prayagraj, around 10,000 police personnel will be stationed.



Uttar Pradesh CM Yogi Adityanath reviews security preparations for Maha Kumbh 2025. (Photo courtesy: Maha Kumbh/Facebook)

The Prayagraj Police Commissionerate's permanent and temporary infrastructure has been divided into eight zones, 18 sectors, 21 companies, two reserve companies of the Central Armed Police Force (CAPF), five companies of the PAC, four teams of the NDRF, 12

teams for AS Check and 4 BDD teams, the statement said.

Recently, Madhya Pradesh Police delegation undertook a two-day visit to Prayagraj to study security and crowd control measures for the Maha Kumbh as part of its preparations for the 2028 Kumbh in Ujjain.

PM Modi's ceremonial 'chadar' to Ajmer Sharif Dargah

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is sending a ceremonial 'chadar' to the Ajmer Sharif Dargah, continuing his yearly tradition. Since becoming prime minister, Narendra Modi has offered a 'chadar' to the Ajmer Sharif Dargah 10 times.

This year will mark his 11th participation in this tradition. The Dargah is one of the most revered Sufi shrines in India, hosts millions of devotees annually during the Urs festival.

India unlikely to respond to Sheikh Hasina extradition call



External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal confirmed that India received a note verbale from Bangladesh late last year. (Photo courtesy: Screengram/X@MEAIndia)

New Delhi: India is unlikely to respond to Bangladesh's request to extradite former premier Sheikh Hasina, HT reported, citing people familiar with the matter, who pointed out that Dhaka has not completed key formalities needed to take forward such an issue.

The extradition request was made in the form of a note verbale, or unsigned diplomatic correspondence, sent by the Bangladesh high commission in New Delhi to the External Affairs

Ministry on December 23, according to the report.

The move came amid unprecedented strain in bilateral ties since the formation of Bangladesh's interim government led by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus.

A note verbale is among the lowest levels of diplomatic exchanges, and not typically used for matters as sensitive as extradition requests, the people said on condition of anonymity.

Hasina, 77, has been in India since she stepped down in the face of nationwide protests led by student groups and fled Dhaka. Yunus and other leaders of the caretaker administration have pointed to Hasina's presence in India and her comments while in exile, describing them as a source of tension.

External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal had on December 23 confirmed that the Indian side received a note verbale from the Bangladeshi side in connection with the extradition request, but declined to comment further.

India, Pakistan exchange lists of civilian prisoners

New Delhi: India and Pakistan exchanged, through diplomatic channels, simultaneously in New Delhi and Islamabad, the lists of civilian prisoners and fishermen in each other's custody. Under the provisions of

the bilateral Agreement on Consular Access 2008, such lists are exchanged every year on 1st January and on 1st July.

India has shared names of 381 civilian prisoners and 81 fishermen in its custody, who

are Pakistani or are believed-to-be-Pakistani. Similarly, Pakistan has shared names of 49 civilian prisoners and 217 fishermen in its custody, who are Indian or are believed-to-be-Indian.

PM Modi meets D Gukesh, Diljit Dosanjh



As he bid goodbye to 2024 and welcomed 2025, Prime Minister Narendra Modi met India's chess prodigy D Gukesh (left) after his historic triumph at the World Chess Championship. The 18-year-old Grandmaster, who became the youngest world champion, gifted PM Modi a signed chessboard. Indian singer and actor Diljit Dosanjh called on PM Modi on New Year's Day and discussed a range of subjects, including music. PM called the Punjabi singer "truly multifaceted, blending talent and tradition".



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New York: The Israeli army has killed a top Hamas commander, Abd al-Hadi Sabah, who led the attack on a Jewish settlement during the October 7, 2023, terror onslaught, the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) has said. The commander of Hamas's elite Nukhba force in Khan Younis was killed in a recent drone strike, the Israeli military and Shin Bet said. He led the terrorist attack on Kibbutz Nir Oz in Israel, during which terrorists kidnapped and murdered dozens, the army said.

"Abd al-Hadi Sabah—who operated from a shelter in the Humanitarian

Area in Khan Yunis—was one of the leaders of the infiltration into Kibbutz Nir Oz during the murderous October 7 Massacre. Sabah also led and advanced numerous terrorist attacks against IDF troops throughout the current war," the IDF tweeted.

This came even as Israel's Channel 12 reported that Hamas spent seven years hacking security cameras to gather intelligence before its coordinated attack on Israel on October 7, 2023. Several documents seized from Hamas operatives during Israel's retaliatory action have revealed details regarding spying on kibbutzim (community living areas) that allegedly went on for at least seven years before the attack last year, the report said.



Israel's bombardment of Gaza continued on New Year's Day, leaving at least 17 Palestinians dead in Jabalia and Bureij refugee camp. (Photo courtesy: Israel Defence Force/Facebook)

Israel's military offensive is continuing across the Gaza Strip, killing at least 45,541 Palestinians and

wounding 108,338 since October 7, 2023, according to the latest estimate by the Palestinian enclave's

As part of an Israeli government effort to fill a void left by tens of thousands of Palestinian construction workers barred from entering Israel since Hamas's 2023 attack, 16,000 Indian construction workers have entered Israel to replace barred Palestinians. AFP news agency reported that before the Hamas attack, around 80,000 Palestinians were employed in construction, along with some 26,000 foreigners.

health ministry. A UN report released this week said it documented 136 strikes on at least 27 hospitals and 12 other medical facilities from October 12, 2023 to June 30, 2024.

Hasina's party may contest polls unless banned: Election chief



Bangladesh plunged into chaos as anti-government protests forced PM Sheikh Hasina to flee to India in 2024. (Photo courtesy: Wikimedia Commons)

Dhaka: Bangladesh's Chief Election Commissioner, AMM Nasir Uddin, has said that unless the government or the judiciary issues a ban, ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina's Awami League may participate in

elections. The remarks were made at a meeting with election officials at the Chittagong Circuit House this week, The Dhaka Tribune newspaper reported.

Nasir Uddin also assured that the Election Commission runs with complete independence and faces no external pressure. "We are committed to taking all necessary steps to ensure a fair and transparent election," he added. He also acknowledged the issue of fake voters in previous elections and attributed a decline in voter registration to mistrust in the voting process.

"The voter list will be updated within the next six months. This time, elections will not follow previous patterns. Since August 5, there has been significant progress in fostering national consensus on elec-

toral matters," he added, providing detailed guidelines on voter list updates and preparations for the upcoming national election.

A few days ago, former prime minister Khaleda Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party said that Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus' suggestion to set the minimum voting age at 17 would put pressure on the Election Commission and could delay the election process.

Yunus, 84, who was sworn-in to lead the interim government after the ouster of former prime minister Sheikh Hasina in August, had suggested that the minimum voter age should be lowered to 17 years. During his Victory Day speech on December 16, Yunus indicated that elections might be held by early 2026.

Pak begins 2-year tenure as UNSC's non-permanent member

Islamabad: As Pakistan began its two-year tenure as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) on January 1, Ambassador Munir Akram said that the country's delegation will play an "active and constructive" role in addressing key challenges facing the world. "Our presence will be felt in the Security Council," Ambassador Akram was quoted as saying by PTI news agency.

The Islamic nation will sit in the Security Council for the 2025-26 term as a non-permanent member — the eighth time that the country has had a seat on the 15-member body's horseshoe table. In June, Pakistan was elected to the council with a massive majority as a non-permanent member, polling 182 votes in the 193-member General Assembly — far more than the



Munir Akram is the Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the United Nations. (Photo courtesy: sdgs.un.org)

required 124 votes representing a two-thirds majority.

"We enter the council at a time of great geopolitical turbulence, intense competition between the two largest powers, raging wars in Europe, the Middle East, Africa and elsewhere and a sharply escalating and multi-dimensional arms race," Akram said.

"As a responsible State — the fifth largest by population —

Pakistan will play an active and constructive role, in accordance with the UN Charter, to halt wars, promote the pacific settlement of disputes and contain the negative impacts of great power rivalries, the arms race, new weapons and domains of conflict as well as the spreading scourge of terrorism," he said.

In the June election in the General Assembly, Pakistan was elected along with Denmark, Greece, Panama and Somalia — to replace Japan, Ecuador, Malta, Mozambique and Switzerland. The new members join the five veto-wielding permanent members the United States, Russia, China, United Kingdom and France and the five countries elected as non-permanent members last year Algeria, Guyana, South Korea, Sierra Leone and Slovenia.

US, Boeing investigators probe S Korean plane crash site



(Representational photo courtesy: Wikimedia Commons)

Washington: A team of investigators from the US government and aircraft manufacturer Boeing Co have arrived at the site of a plane crash that killed 179 people in South Korea to participate in the investigation into the incident, officials said on December 31, 2024.

The plane, a Boeing 737-800 operated by South Korean budget airline Jeju Air,

was carrying 181 people from Thailand on Sunday when it issued a mayday call and belly-landed before hitting a barrier and bursting into flames, killing everyone aboard except two flight attendants who were pulled from the burning wreckage.

According to Seoul's transport ministry, one member from the US Federal Aviation Administration, three experts from the US National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) and four representatives from Boeing have joined officials of South Korea's Aviation and Railway Accident Investigation Board (ARAIB) for the investigation at the site of the accident, IANS reported, citing Yonhap news agency.

The US team arrived in South

Korea this week via Incheon International Airport and travelled directly to Muan, some 290 kilometres southwest of Seoul, to prepare for the investigation. "South Korean and US investigators discussed the schedule procedures and specific areas of focus for the investigation," Joo Jong-wan, head of aviation policy at the transport ministry, said at a press briefing.

According to the ministry, the US and Boeing representatives, together with 11 members of South Korea's ARAIB, are currently assessing the wreckage and debris at the crash site, searching for components that could offer clues about the cause of the accident.

One of the black boxes, the aircraft's flight data recorder, was found to have suffered exterior damage and to be missing a connector that links its data storage unit to the power supply. The second black box, the cockpit voice recorder, is reportedly in a relatively better condition. Investigators said they will send one of the retrieved black boxes to the United States for analysis, according to AFP news agency.



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Annual Predictions: For those born in this week (January 4-10, 2025)

January 5, 2024

Guided by number 5 and Mercury, your sharp and sensitive nature defines you. Although the year may begin with financial hurdles, cautious and thoughtful investments will bring stability later. Property matters will gain momentum mid-year, while past investments will generate profits. A pilgrimage towards the year's end will provide spiritual peace and rejuvenation. Romance is likely to blossom, and for some, matrimonial alliances will materialize. Those planning international trips can expect memorable experiences. Stay calm and patient during initial challenges, and the months of February, April, and October will deliver promising developments.

January 6, 2024

Ruled by number 6 and Venus, your sharp memory and attraction to modern technology give you an edge. Professionally, this is the perfect time to make significant decisions as income and opportunities grow. Business expansions and speculative ventures will yield positive results.

Overseas travels for work or leisure are likely, adding excitement to the year. Minor health issues like body aches may bother you, so prioritize rest and care. Family life will be fulfilling but demanding, with children and your spouse seeking attention. Stay focused and organized. The months of February, May, July, and October hold great potential for success and happiness.

January 7, 2024

Dominated by number 7 and Neptune, your creativity, reliability, and emotional depth help you thrive. Financial gains and new income streams will brighten your year, though rising expenses may challenge savings. Travel opportunities will lead to fruitful connections and personal growth. Home life will be pleasant, but family health could cause anxiety. Spiritually, you'll feel drawn toward deeper practices and introspection, helping you find peace amid life's demands. Embrace flexibility and avoid stubborn tendencies. The months of March, June, and November will be especially

eventful, guiding you toward an enriching year.

January 8, 2024

Ruled by number 8 and Saturn, your systematic and methodical nature helps you overcome obstacles with courage. Financially, this year marks progress as new jobs and assignments fulfill your dreams. Legal issues and minor health concerns may require attention, but monetary gains and spiritual satisfaction will balance out challenges. Socially, guests and relatives will bring happiness and gifts, adding warmth to your life. Romance will rekindle excitement, and spiritual pursuits may bring fulfillment later in the year. The months of January, May, September, and November promise notable developments, ensuring steady progress.

January 9, 2024

Guided by number 9 and Mars, your energy, charm, and intellect draw people to you effortlessly. Money matters will demand focus as you take on new ventures and technological upgrades to enhance

your work. Family life will be peaceful, with ample support from your loved ones. Romance will bring joy, while wedding bells may ring for some later in the year. Stay mindful of short tempers and over-aggression, as they may hinder growth. The months of February, June, and October will mark significant milestones, bringing exciting opportunities.

January 10, 2024

Influenced by number 1 and the Sun, your dynamic and talented personality shines brightly. This year, focus on balancing your workload to avoid emotional burnout. Financially, cautious investments will yield favorable outcomes, and those seeking education abroad will achieve success.

Health will remain stable, though emotional outbursts may cause personal setbacks. A distant journey for an auspicious occasion or pilgrimage awaits towards the year's end. The months of April, July, and October will bring promising results, ensuring growth and progress.

Stars Foretell: January 4-10, 2025

ARIES (Mar 21-Apr 20)

Avoid rushing into things this week as haste may lead to errors. If you're considering upgrading your skills or qualifications, this is the perfect time to take that leap to boost your career prospects. On the social front, your generosity will not go unnoticed and is likely to earn you appreciation. Academic pursuits are set to bring promising opportunities. Married Aries might consider reliving old memories with a second honeymoon as romance takes center stage. A short break from your usual routine is on the cards, and it will do you a world of good. Lucky No.: 9 Lucky Colour: Saffron

TAURUS (Apr 21-May 20)

Travel plans to visit loved ones may materialize, making it a fulfilling week. Home improvements are likely to demand your attention, keeping you occupied. A little extra effort at work will ensure tasks are completed to the satisfaction of your superiors and help you avoid any setbacks. Financially, control impulsive purchases as they may dent your savings. On the academic front, don't be disheartened by minor challenges—a positive mindset can turn the tide in your favor. Lucky No.: 1 Lucky Colour: Light Yellow

GEMINI (May 21-Jun 21)

Travel plans to visit loved ones may materialize, making it a fulfilling week. Home improvements are likely to demand your attention, keeping you occupied. A little extra effort at work will ensure tasks are completed to the satisfaction of your superiors and help you avoid any setbacks. Financially, control impulsive purchases as they may dent your savings. On the academic front, don't be disheartened by minor challenges—a positive mindset can turn the tide in your favor. Lucky No.: 1 Lucky Colour: Light Yellow

CANCER (Jun 22-Jul 22)

Stay extra cautious at work this week to avoid minor mistakes that may attract criticism. It's a good time to reassess your career goals and make informed decisions about the future. Academic workload might seem heavy, but persistence will help you succeed. On the domestic front, patience will be key—especially if you and your spouse disagree on something. However, romance is likely to bloom, and your efforts will lead to happy moments with your partner. Lucky No.: 9 Lucky Colour: Red

LEO (Jul 23-Aug 23)

Procrastination is your enemy this week, so tackle tasks head-on and avoid delays. Health takes a positive turn, and you may meet someone inspiring while working out or pursuing an active hobby. Romantic relationships look promising as feelings are likely to be reciprocated. Financially, things remain steady, but a minor professional challenge may require you to step up and prove your worth. Keep an optimistic outlook, and success will follow. Lucky No.: 8 Lucky Colour: Blue

VIRGO (Aug 24-Sept 23)

Your relationships continue to bring you happiness and confidence this week. Socially, your reputation shines, and someone special may express intentions of taking your romance to the next level. If you've been eyeing a vacation, the probability of planning one is high. On the property front, those seeking accommodation are likely to find their ideal place. A small misunderstanding could frustrate you, but patience will prevent any escalation. Lucky No.: 11 Lucky Colour: Pink

LIBRA (Sept 24-Oct 23)

If things at work aren't progressing as planned, this is the right time to take corrective steps. Health will improve as you overcome any recent setbacks. Your hard work on the academic front is likely to yield positive outcomes, so stay consistent. Socially, you may worry unnecessarily, but your bond with people remains strong. Keep sensitive family matters private to avoid unwanted interference and misunderstandings. Lucky No.: 22 Lucky Colour: Silver

SCORPIO (Oct 24-Nov 22)

This week, adapt your approach to gain favor with those who matter. Academically, progress looks promising as you move closer to your goals. A special invitation may come your way, offering an opportunity to socialize. In your personal life, resolving differences will help strengthen your relationship. Legal matters concerning ancestral property may require your attention. A short trip is likely to bring pleasant moments and memories. Lucky No.: 1 Lucky Colour: Maroon

SAGITTARIUS (Nov 23-Dec 21)

Channel your energy into pursuits that truly excite you this week. Financial rewards are on the horizon, thanks to your diligent efforts. Romance is in the air, promising fun-filled and memorable moments with your partner. Professionally, this is a favorable time to clear up any misunderstandings and reinforce your position. Academic progress will bring you satisfaction, but caution is advised while traveling. Lucky No.: 4 Lucky Colour: Beige

CAPRICORN (Dec 22-Jan 21)

Though certain relationships may seem strained, maintaining hope and open communication can ease tensions. At work, clarity about your responsibilities will ensure success, so proceed carefully. Academically, you'll keep up with your peers with steady efforts. In business, a wise decision can save you money and strengthen your position. Family needs will take priority this week, so show your support to ensure harmony at home. Lucky No.: 18 Lucky Colour: Golden

AQUARIUS (Jan 22-Feb 19)

This week, it's time to put your ideas into motion—opportunities are coming your way. Your interest in yoga or meditation is likely to bring peace and boost overall health. Financially, someone may owe you money, but don't hesitate to remind them—you'll get it back. Job satisfaction might feel elusive, pushing you to explore other options. On the academic front, thorough preparation will be key to overcoming challenges. Lucky No.: 7 Lucky Colour: Saffron

PISCES (Feb 20-Mar 20)

It's an ideal week to execute your plans and watch them take shape. Handling family matters with sensitivity will strengthen bonds and ensure peace at home. Your romantic life appears fulfilling, with quality time bringing you closer to your partner. Professionally, motivating your team will be essential to keep up the momentum. Academic hurdles are temporary, and persistence will help you overcome them. Prioritize savings to secure financial stability. Lucky No.: 3 Lucky Colour: Purple



Jimmy Carter the 39th president of the United States, passed away on Sunday at his home in Plains, Georgia, as confirmed by The Carter Center. Carter, who made history as the nation's longest-living president, celebrated his 100th birthday earlier this year. According to Thomas Perls, a geriatrician and head of the New England Centenarian, approximately 10% of people have the potential to reach the age of 100.

Here are a few lessons we can learn from the former president's remarkable journey:

1. Sense of purpose

Jimmy Carter and his wife, Rosalynn, were deeply committed to community service, dedicating their time to building, renovating,

and repairing over 4,300 homes across 14 countries through Habitat for Humanity since 1984.

In one of his books, Carter reflected on how this work brought him immense joy and fulfillment.

2. Embracing new challenges

After leaving the White House, Jimmy Carter and his wife founded the Carter Center to promote human rights and ease suffering worldwide. He travelled extensively, wrote books, volunteered, and even learned to ski downhill at 62. Reflecting on his adventurous spirit, Rosalynn shared in the book "What Makes a Marriage Last" that her husband wasn't content with just learning about things—he was determined to do them.

3. Fulfilling relationships

Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter shared 77 years of marriage—the longest in presidential history. Carter called it "a full partner-

7 key longevity lessons from Jimmy Carter's remarkable, century-long life



Jimmy Carter, the longest-lived US President passed away at 100. (Photo courtesy: Wikipedia.org)

ship," crediting Rosalynn as his equal in all accomplishments. When Rosalynn passed away on November 19, 2023, Carter expressed, "As long as Rosalynn was in the world, I always knew somebody loved and supported me."

At her tribute service, their daughter, Amy, read a love letter

Carter wrote 75 years earlier, saying, "When I see you, I fall in love with you all over again." Their close-knit family includes children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

4. Staying active

Jimmy Carter was dedicated to staying active, running until age 80 before switching to swimming and walking due to knee issues. He and Rosalynn enjoyed biking together and also loved fly fishing and woodworking.

5. Warm and outgoing personality

Centenarians often share an extroverted nature, forming strong friendships and social networks that promote cognitive health and prevent loneliness, according to Perls. Jimmy Carter embodied this trait, known for his gregarious, caring, and empathetic personality. Perls notes he was "probably the most caring and empathetic president" of his time.

A viral video even captured the 92-year-old former president shaking hands with every passenger on a plane. In addition to being social, people who live long lives tend to have conscientious, dependable, and prudent personalities that grow stronger with age, says Friedman.

6. Resilience

The former president overcame numerous challenges, including health issues, the loss of his wife, and over a year in hospice care. This reflects Carter's resilience, a key factor in longevity.

7. Faith

From 1981 to 2020, Jimmy Carter taught Sunday school at Maranatha Baptist Church in Plains, Georgia, reflecting the importance of faith in his life. Friedman notes that spirituality often fosters gratitude and connections with positive, supportive people.

(Courtesy: www.hindustan-times.com)

MELVIN DURAI'S HUMOR COLUMN

Give me more chocolate - I'm almost diabetic

When my wife and I invite friends for dinner, they often show up bearing gifts. The most common gifts are wine and chocolate. I really appreciate these gifts, because they show how much our friends care about our health.

Are wine and chocolate really good for you? It depends on which scientist manages to bamboozle you.

Well, they're not really trying to deceive you — they just happen to come up with starkly differing conclusions from their research. According to one group of scientists, drinking a glass of wine each day will put you at risk for a host of health problems. According to

another group, a glass of wine will improve your blood circulation and let you live longer. This begs the question: how much wine do these scientists believe a person can reasonably drink while conducting scientific experiments?

In general, the health risks associated with drinking alcohol greatly outweigh any benefits, especially since many people are unable to control themselves. Even if drinking a small glass of wine may offer minimal benefits, these benefits quickly disappear if you deplete the liquor store. You are better off drinking a glass of carrot juice, because in the history of the world, there have been only a few cases of carrot juice addiction. And all of them involved rabbits.

Eating chocolate also requires moderation; otherwise you might find yourself attending weekly meetings of Chocoholics Anonymous. Just a few pieces each day are enough to derive any health benefits. One of these benefits, according to a new study from Harvard University, is diabetes prevention. The study, published in The BMJ, suggests that consuming dark chocolate may reduce your risk of getting Type 2 diabetes by 21 percent.

This is good news for me. Diabetes runs in my family and I've been diagnosed as prediabetic, so I'm hoping that the next time I see my doctor, she prescribes a heavy

dose of chocolate for me.

Unfortunately I prefer the wrong kind of chocolate: milk chocolate.

"Our findings suggest that not all chocolate is created equal," said the Harvard study's lead author Binkai Liu. "For anyone who loves chocolate, this is a reminder that making small choices, like choosing dark chocolate over milk chocolate, can make a positive difference to their health."

To conduct their study, the researchers looked at health data collected over 30-plus years from 192,000 adult participants. They found that people who consumed at least five servings of dark chocolate per week showed a 21% lower risk of Type 2 diabetes. People who consumed milk chocolate did not get the same benefit. Instead, they showed a 21% higher risk of breaking a scale. (Weight gain was connected to increased consumption of milk chocolate, but not dark chocolate.)

"We were surprised by the clear split between dark and milk chocolate's impact on diabetes risk and long-term weight management," said the study's co-author Qi Sun. "Even though dark and milk chocolate have similar levels of calories and saturated fat, it appears that the rich polyphenols in dark chocolate might offset the effects of saturated fat and sugar on weight gain and diabetes." (Rich polyphenols, not surprisingly, tend to reside in

upscale chocolate, segregating themselves from poor polyphenols.)

One limitation of the study is that the participants were mostly white, so the results may not apply to all races. Indeed, if white people benefit from eating dark chocolate, perhaps dark people can benefit from eating white chocolate. (Now you know why I'm not a scientist.)

It's worth noting that previous

studies have shown a correlation (not causation) between eating dark chocolate and a reduced risk for cardiovascular disease. Chocolate consumption has also been linked to lower blood pressure and improved blood cholesterol.

So if you happen to be coming to my house for dinner, feel free to bring chocolate, and don't mind me if I have it as my main course.



Photo by Tetiana Bykovets on Unsplash (Photo provided by Melvin Durai)

Laughter is the Best Medicine



Look on the bright side—sure, it mostly goes down, but hey, every now and then, it pretends to go up too!

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.

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Print and DigitalBy **Amrutvijaydas Swami**
BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha

In previous articles, we have explored how a mandir stabilizes the mind, inspires noble living, and fosters mutual respect. Now, let us delve into another significant aspect of the mandir: its role in preserving and protecting culture and tradition. In our increasingly secular and materialistic world, it's easy for respect and reverence towards one's own culture and traditions to be overshadowed. Mandirs, or Hindu temples, however, stand as a bastion against this onslaught, preserving and reviving the richness of our cultural heritage.

Many Hindus living in the USA, UK, Australia, New Zealand, and other countries have become reattached to Indian culture and tradi-

tions as a result of their involvement in the mandirs built there. Mandirs built many decades ago by Hindus living in Guyana, Fiji and Mauritius have helped to preserve traditional values in their descendants.

For thousands of years, up to the present day, Vedic architectural science has guided the layout, design and construction of thousands of magnificent mandirs, both in India and outside: the Surya Rath Mandir of Konark on the Wheels of Time, the soaring Shikhar of Tirupati, the charming robustness of Kedarnath, the delicate forms of Belur-Somnathpuri, the stupendous pradakshina of Rameshwar, the stunning gateway of the Madurai Meenakshi Mandir, the romantically Dwarka Mandir, the intricately and artistically sculpted BAPS Swaminarayan Mandirs in the USA and the hi-tech Akshardham Complexes in Gandhinagar and New Delhi - all represent the millennium-old culture and traditions of India enshrined in



BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Robbinsville, New Jersey
(Photo provided by BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha)

stone. As marvels of art and architecture, mandirs enhance the local landscape.

As wonders of art and architecture, these mandirs do more than just enhance the local landscape. They serve as vibrant hubs for the performing arts, with BAPS mandirs, in particular, providing avenues for skill development in

dance, drama, vocal and instrumental music. These cultural centers also foster traditional arts, crafts, and cuisine, thereby nurturing a living link with our heritage.

The resurgence of the haveli style of wood architecture, a tradition lost for over a century, is a commendable outcome of the construction of BAPS mandirs in places like

London, Nairobi, Chicago, and Los Angeles in recent years. The extensive use of intricately sculpted wood in these structures preserves the centuries-old skills of our artisans.

Mandirs represent the tangible bridges that connect us with the richness of India's age-old traditions, regardless of where we are in the world. They serve as perpetual reminders for every generation of Indians—past, present, and future—of their eternal bond with God.

More than that, they call upon us to carry forth the responsibility of preserving and

nourishing the unique cultural and spiritual legacy of India.

Let us, as Indian Americans, celebrate and take pride in these splendid edifices, which not only anchor us to our roots but also inspire us to strive towards nobler living. Through mandirs, we can foster mutual respect, propagate our cultural heritage, and ensure its vibrant continuity for the generations to come.

ANUVRAT MOVEMENT

Never been easier to live kinder, healthier lifestyle

By **John Di Leonardo**

In 2024, my organization Humane Long Island - which leads campaigns advocating and rescuing animals from Manhattan to Montauk - saved the lives of thousands of animals. We worked with authorities to jail animal abusers; with local universities to cancel animal exploitation conventions; exposed the negligent deaths of giraffes, porcupines, and even a bear at roadside zoos; and shut down and canceled the license of Sloth Encounters - an unlawfully operated exotic petting zoo and pet store on Long Island. Our campaigns were featured on the cover of Newsday and The New York Times multiple times and we rehabilitated and released countless animals.

But you don't need to found an animal advocacy organization in order to save hundreds of animals every year. By following just one simple ANUVRAT—or small vow—that of ahimsa—or nonviolence—you can save the lives of 200 animals annually by simply leaving animals and their products off of your plate. This New Year's resolution wouldn't just benefit the animals. It would benefit you as well.

Going vegan puts you into a category that is one-ninth as likely to be obese as meat-eaters and have a cancer rate that is only 40 percent that of meat-eaters. Replacing



Acharya Tulsi Ji
(Image provided by Arvind Vora)

meat and dairy with delicious 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. In fact, 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.

Going vegan also removes you from contributing to the stagger-

ing 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 is also contaminating our waterways.

"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 replacements 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.



(Image provided by the author)



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.



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