



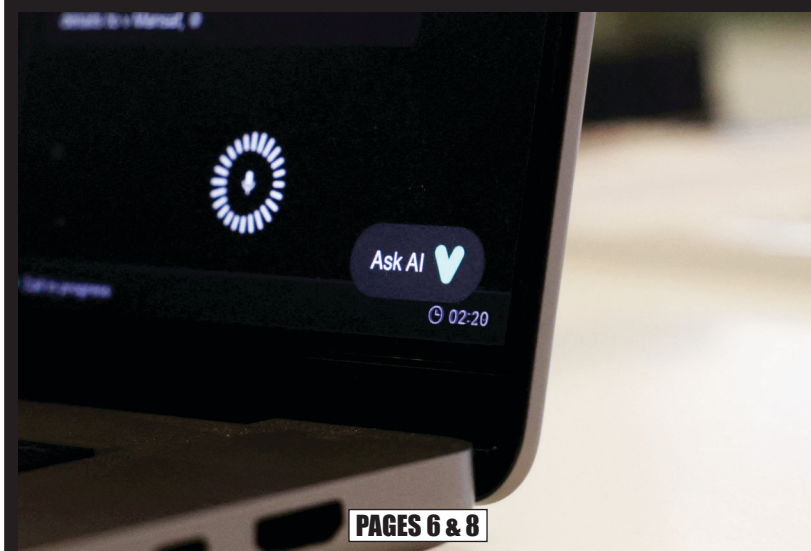
October 24, 2025
Chicago, IL.
Vol. XXIX, No. 43
www.desitalkchicago.com

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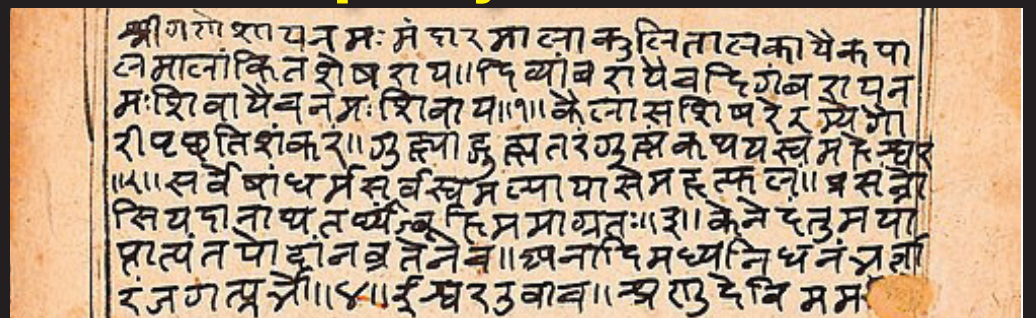
AI Chatbots replacing India's Call Centers workers



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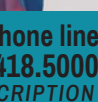
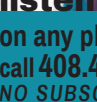
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India's AI Journey: Transforming Fiscal Management For A Developed India

By RAMESH KUMAR NANJUNDAIYA

AI is proving to be more than just a digital tool; it is becoming a fiscal multiplier. By tightening compliance, improving revenue forecasts, preventing leakages, and guiding expenditure, AI is reshaping India's fiscal landscape. Recent tax reforms under the GST regime adjusting slabs to reduce rates on essentials while taxing luxury goods higher were made possible through AI-driven fiscal analytics.

India's rapid adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is no longer confined to technology labs or industry pilots. It is becoming a core enabler of governance, particularly in its fiscal management, the backbone of any modern economy. In recent years, AI is helping India plug revenue leakages, strengthen budget forecasting, improve subsidy targeting and enhance financial inclusion. This transformation is positioning AI as a fiscal multiplier for the country's journey toward Viksit Bharat (Developed India) 2047.

BUILDING FISCAL AI FOUNDATIONS

The launch of the IndiaAI Mission (2024), backed by 10,300 crore over five years, established one of the world's largest AI compute infrastructures with nearly 18,700 GPUs. This computing backbone powers fiscal applications such as real-time GST monitoring, subsidy disbursal analytics and expenditure forecasting. Early results show that AI is improving tax compliance and reducing fraudulent claims, thereby strengthening India's fiscal base.

DATA AS THE NEW FISCAL FUEL:

The IndiaAI Dataset Platform is emerging as a game-changer. By opening anonymized datasets to researchers and startups, the government is enabling large-scale fiscal simulations. Analysts can now model indirect tax elasticity, test subsidy impact and run "what-if" budget scenarios. This data-driven approach allows India to respond proactively to shocks such as commodity price fluctuations rather than react belatedly.

AI IN SECTORAL PLANNING AND BUDGETING:

AI-driven Centres of Excellence (CoEs) in agriculture, healthcare, and education are generating fiscal insights with direct policy relevance. For example, crop yield forecasts are helping calibrate procurement and subsidy budgets, while healthcare AI tools predict demand for medicines and beds, guiding public health expenditure. Such sectoral intelligence ensures more efficient allocation of scarce resources.

FINANCIAL INCLUSION THROUGH LANGUAGE AI:

Fiscal efficiency is not just about numbers it is also about inclusion. Platforms like Bhashini and Sarvam-1



PHOTO: COURTESY AI

Depiction of AI.

are breaking language barriers, enabling farmers, traders and small businesses across India to access government schemes and understand tax norms in their native languages. This multilingual access improves compliance, expands the taxpayer base and increases participation in digital payments.

STRENGTHENING DIGITAL PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE:

India's Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), Aadhaar, UPI, DigiLocker has already transformed service delivery. With AI integration, it is now tackling fiscal leakages. AI-powered fraud detection in Direct Benefit Transfers (DBTs) is reducing duplicate and ineligible claims. Recent pilots during Mahakumbh 2025 demonstrated AI-enabled DPI's ability to manage massive financial flows in real time insights now being adapted for pension disbursal, subsidy transfers, and tax refunds.

CASE STUDIES: AI IN FISCAL ACTION:

The results are tangible.

GST analytics engines have identified thousands of fraudulent firms using fake invoices, saving billions in lost revenue.

DBT monitoring systems, cross-checking Aadhaar with bank accounts, are blocking duplicate or ineligible subsidy claims

These examples highlight how AI safeguards taxpayer money and ensures greater fiscal discipline.

Human Capital and Private Innovation:

To sustain this momentum, India is investing in AI skilling and talent pipelines through the IndiaAI Future Skills initiative. Universities and AI labs in Tier 2 and 3 cities are training fiscal data analysts, while Global Capability Centers (GCCs) mainly in South India are increasingly handling compliance and financial analytics for both

government and private clients.

At the same time, startups are building AI audit tools and corporates are deploying compliance monitoring systems, widening the fiscal net and reducing costs for SMEs.

Responsible and Ethical AI in Finance:

Trust is central to fiscal governance. India's pragmatic regulatory approach neither overregulating nor leaving AI unchecked ensures safeguards against fraud and cyber risks. IITs and universities are working on AI ethics frameworks, reinforcing public trust in AI-driven fiscal systems.

2025 - AI as India's Fiscal Multiplier

AI is proving to be more than just a digital tool; it is becoming a fiscal multiplier. By tightening compliance, improving revenue forecasts, preventing leakages, and guiding expenditure, AI is reshaping India's fiscal landscape. Recent tax reforms under the GST regime adjusting slabs to reduce rates on essentials while taxing luxury goods higher were made possible through AI-driven fiscal analytics.

As India advances towards Viksit Bharat 2047, the integration of AI in fiscal management is emerging as both a necessity and a strategic advantage. By embedding AI into public finance, India is building a governance model that is predictive, precise, transparent, and inclusive qualities that every modern economy must aspire to.

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PHOTO: SOUTH ASIA MONITOR

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-(THIS ARTICLE APPEARED IN SOUTH ASIA MONITOR OCT. 10, 2025. USED UNDER SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT WITH SAM)

How India Tariffs Hurt America's China Strategy

Even if President Donald Trump was right that foreign countries absorb the cost of his tariffs, that wouldn't mean they are necessarily in America's interest. Suppressing economic growth in strategically important regions can easily backfire on the United States.

Consider South Asia. The region is mostly populated by India and Bangladesh, along with smaller countries like Nepal and Sri Lanka. The World Bank projected last week that the region's GDP growth would fall to 5.8 percent in 2026 from 6.6 percent in 2025. The "forecast has been downgraded," the report notes, in part because "India continues to face higher-than-expected tariffs on goods exports to the United States."

Trump doubled the U.S. tariff rate on India to 50 percent in August. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's economic adviser estimates that U.S. tariffs will take

about half a point off India's growth rate.

Why should an "America First" administration care about that? Because China is by far the largest economy in Asia and the most threatening regime to the United States. Economic growth correlates with diplomatic and military strength. If South Asia is relatively weaker, then China has more freedom to throw its weight along its eastern coast. Conflict in that region - which includes treaty allies Japan and the Philippines - risks sparking a direct confrontation with China.

It is in America's national interest, then, for South Asia, and especially India, to grow at a rapid clip. That would create a counterweight in Asia to China's massive economic and military expansion. Trump's barrage of tariffs on India in August was supposedly a response to its importation of Russian oil, even though China is a bigger customer of the same product. But Trump is determined

to negotiate a grand trade bargain with Chinese leader Xi Jinping, so he didn't impose secondary sanctions on their purchases of Russian crude.

Trump wants U.S. trade policy to be more self-interested, but it doesn't serve America's strategic interests to strengthen China's position relative to its neighbors. At some level, the administration surely knows this. Indeed, its continued commitment to strengthening the Quad - comprising the United States, Japan, India and Australia - shows that it understands that regional power balances matter. Reuters reported this week that new trade talks are in the works. Negotiators can address differences with New Delhi without losing sight of its crucial role balancing Beijing.

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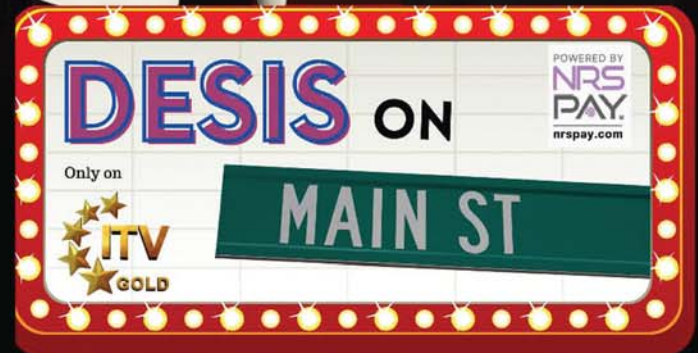
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Meet The AI Chatbots Replacing India's Call-Center Workers

By MUNSIF VENGATTIL AND ADITYA KALRA

At a startup office in this Indian city, developers are fine-tuning artificial-intelligence chatbots that talk and message like humans.

The company, LimeChat, has an audacious goal: to make customer-service jobs almost obsolete. It says its generative AI agents enable clients to slash by 80% the number of workers needed to handle 10,000 monthly queries.

"Once you hire a LimeChat agent, you never have to hire again," Nikhil Gupta, its 28-year-old co-founder, told Reuters.

Cheap labor and English proficiency helped make India the world's back office — sometimes at the expense of workers elsewhere. Now, AI-powered systems are subsuming jobs done by headset-wearing graduates in technical support, customer care and data management, sparking a scramble to adapt, a Reuters examination found.

That's driving business for AI startups that help companies slash staffing costs and scale operations — even though many consumers still prefer to deal with a person.

This account of the disruptive changes transforming India's \$283 billion IT sector is based on interviews with 30 people, including industry executives, recruiters, workers and current and former government officials. Reuters also visited two AI startups and tested voice and text chatbots that handle increasingly sophisticated customer interactions in human-like ways.

Rather than pump the brakes as the technology threatens jobs built on routine tasks, the country is accelerating, wagering that a let-it-rip approach will create enough new opportunities to absorb those displaced, Reuters found. The outcome of India's gamble carries weight far beyond its borders — a test case for whether embracing AI-driven disruption can elevate a developing economy or render it a cautionary tale.

The global conversational AI market is growing 24% a year and should reach \$41 billion by 2030, consultancy Grand View Research estimates.

India — which relies on IT for 7.5% of its GDP — is leaning in. In a February speech, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said "work does not disappear due to technology. Its nature changes and new types of jobs are created."

Not everyone shares Modi's confidence in India's preparedness. Santosh Mehrotra, a former Indian official and visiting professor at the University of Bath's Centre for Development Studies, criticized the government for a lack of urgency in assessing AI's effects on India's young workforce. "There's no gameplan," he said.

Business process management employs 1.65 million workers in call centers, payroll, and data handling in India. Hiring has plummeted due to increased automation and digitalization, despite rising demand for AI coordinators and process analysts, said Neeti Sharma, CEO of staffing firm TeamLease Digital.

Net headcount in the segment, which represents one-fifth of IT output, grew by fewer than 17,000 workers in each of the past two years, down from 130,000 in 2022-2023 and 177,000 in 2021-2022, TeamLease Digital figures show.

Reuters spoke to three current and five former customer-service workers, who described increasing job insecurity and integration of AI, including tools that suggest responses and bots that handle nearly all routine queries autonomously.

Megha S., 32, was earning \$10,000 a year at a Bengaluru-based software solutions provider. She said she was laid off last month, just before India's festive season, as the company moved to implement AI tools to review the quality of sales calls.

"I was told I am the first one who has been replaced by AI," said Megha, who spoke on the condition that her full



Developers work inside the office of AI startup LimeChat in Bengaluru, India, August 19, 2025. R



Developers attend a meeting inside pods at the office of AI startup LimeChat in Bengaluru, India, August 19, 2025.

name and former employer not be identified. "I've not told my parents."

Sumita Dawra, a former labor ministry secretary who oversaw an Indian government taskforce on AI's impact on the workforce before retiring in March, said while the technology offered productivity gains that would lead to new jobs, India could consider stronger social security measures, such as unemployment benefits, to help those displaced during the transition.

However, a senior Indian official told Reuters the government believed AI would ultimately have little impact on overall employment. India's IT and labor ministries, and Modi's office, didn't respond to requests for comment.

AUTOMATION GOLD RUSH

Besides AI, factors clouding the outlook for India's IT sector include U.S. tariffs; a proposal by a U.S. lawmaker for a 25% tax on firms using foreign outsourcing services; and President Trump's \$100,000 fee on new H-1B visas, which are widely used by tech firms to sponsor Indian workers.

Investment bank Jefferies predicted in September that India's call centers would face a revenue hit of 50% — and around 35% for other back-office functions — from AI adoption over the next five years.

That would spell near-term job losses in India, which accounts for 52% of the global outsourcing market.

"The biggest impact is going to be on young students coming out of college," said Pramod Bhasin, who in the 1990s established India's first call center with 18 employees for GE Capital, where workstations were partitioned by saris strung from the ceiling.

In the longer run, India could transition from "back office" to the world's "AI factory" by capitalizing on demand for AI engineers and automation deployment, said Bhasin, who went on to found IT services firm Genpact.

One beneficiary of that demand is LimeChat, which Reuters visited in August. Gupta, the co-founder, said his developers and engineers have helped automate 5,000 jobs across India. The company's bots handle 70% of customer complaints for its clients, and it plans to achieve 90-95% within a year, he said.

"If you're giving us 100,000 rupees per month, you are automating the job of at least 15 agents," said Gupta. At that price — about \$1,130 — the service costs roughly the same as three customer-care staff, he said.

LimeChat's sales soared to \$1.5 million in 2024 from \$79,000 two years earlier, regulatory disclosures show. Last year, the firm began integrating Microsoft's Azure language models and algorithms in a partnership to launch a new e-commerce chatbot.

Among Gupta's clients is Indian ayurvedic products firm Kapiva, which has deployed a LimeChat bot for customer interactions over WhatsApp.

Keying in a prompt — "What kind of diet should I have to reduce weight?" — yielded an AI meal-plan creator. A follow-up query in English and Hindi about how a slimming juice differs from another item was also answered, with the chatbot eventually sharing links to Kapiva products with a smiling emoji. Kapiva didn't respond to Reuters questions.

LimeChat's rivals include Reliance, the conglomerate chaired by Mukesh Ambani, which acquired Indian startup Haptik in 2019.

Haptik says it offers "AI agents that deliver human-like customer experiences" that cost \$120 and can cut support costs by 30%. Revenue skyrocketed to almost \$18 million last year from less than \$1 million in 2020, disclosures show.

Haptik promoted a webinar in September by posing the question: "What if you had a full-time employee who never sleeps and costs just 10,000 rupees?"

"We are seeing a huge shift," Haptik product manager Suji Ravi said in the webinar, which Reuters reporters attended. "Brands are not investing in human agents and they want to deploy AI agents."

For LimeChat client Mamaearth, an Indian personal-care brand, the main attraction of AI chatbots is scalability, said Vipul Maheshwari, head of product and analytics at parent firm Honasa Consumer.

"Providing good customer support is make or break for us," he said. "But can we infinitely scale my customer support team? Absolutely not."

The chatbot used by Mamaearth could go beyond simple assistance like order tracking, and help users with queries such as recommending the right products during pregnancy or, in some cases, handle an agitated customer, Maheshwari said.

COFFEE WITH NEHA

The promise and perils of AI are evident at The Media Ant. The Bengaluru-based advertising agency cut 40% of its workforce to about 100 over the past year and vacated space in another building to save on rent, said founder Samir Chaudhary.

The firm eliminated 15 salespeople, replacing them with AI bots that identify leads and send emails to prospective customers, Chaudhary said. A six-member call center was replaced with a voice agent called Neha that speaks in near-flawless, Indian-accented English.

When a Reuters reporter asked Neha about advertising on YouTube, she sought details about the budget and target markets, noted the requirements, and ended the conversation cheerfully: "I will email you the details ... have a great day."

"Ask her out for a coffee and she will laugh it off," Chaudhary said.

Yet the race to embrace AI isn't always smooth for companies.

Take Sweden's Klarna. Chatbots helped the fintech

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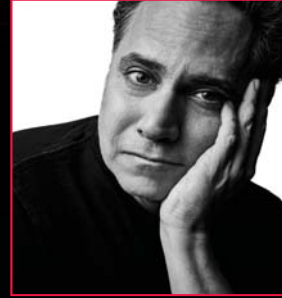
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Meet The AI Chatbots Replacing India's Call-Center Workers

-CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

firm cut thousands of jobs last year, but its CEO told Reuters in September the company is now “trying to course correct” and use the technology to improve products rather than reduce costs.

Chatbots have limitations. While most generic e-commerce-related queries posed by a Reuters reporter were handled well by LimeChat bots, some stumped them.

When LimeChat client Knya's bot was asked for proof of its claim that a million medical professionals trust its products, such as its stethoscopes, it replied: “I am sorry, I don't have enough information to answer your question.” Knya didn't respond to a request for comment.

Customer surveys show chatbots are still disliked by many.

An August 2024 EY survey of 1,000 Indian consumers found 62% made purchases influenced by AI recommendations, compared with 30% globally. Yet, “the desire for a human connection remains strong,” EY noted, with 78% preferring online platforms that provide human support.

LimeChat's Gupta, though, said well-trained AI agents could resolve queries faster than humans. He said many standard bots pass conversations to a human agent when they encounter angry customers: “You need a very small



PHOTO: REUTERS/RISHIKA SADAM

People walk around a complex of software skill training centres surrounded by multiple billboards in Hyderabad, India, April 25, 2025.

number of people to just handle negative experiences.”

FROM JAVA TO AI

In the 1990s and 2000s, India's tech boom fueled rural-to-urban migration. Cities like Bengaluru became outsourcing hubs as domestic firms, including Tata

Consultancy Services, Infosys and Wipro, grew into global juggernauts.

That expansion trickled through to Ameerpet, a Hyderabad neighborhood where university graduates fill classrooms to learn IT skills and earn certifications for tech jobs.

Ameerpet's training centers traditionally offered courses in Microsoft Office and programming languages like Java. Visiting in April, Reuters found these centers are increasingly focused on AI training. Outside one, Quality Thought, a banner featured a robot overlooking a globe with the letters “AI.”

The center was offering a nine-month course in AI data science and prompt engineering for about \$1,360, more than double the price of a traditional web-development program.

“Recruiters are asking for students with basic AI skills,” staffer Priyanka Kandulapati said. “We are going to streamline our courses even further to suit the demand.”

In a discussion with startup founders last month about the pace of change, venture capitalist Vinod Khosla, who co-founded Sun Microsystems, offered a stark view of the future for India.

“All IT services will be replaced in the next five years,” he said. “It's going to be pretty chaotic.”

-REUTERS

BUSINESS

Hundreds Attend TiECON East 2025 To Focus On The “Heart Of Entrepreneurship”

BY A STAFF WRITER

From billion-dollar founders to first-time entrepreneurs, more than 450 attendees gathered at the Sheraton Boston Hotel for TiECON East 2025, a much-anticipated conference, organized by TiE Boston and co-hosted by TiE New York.

TiECON East is the flagship conference of TiE Boston, part of the global TiE (The Indus Entrepreneurs) network. TiE Boston is one of the oldest and largest TiE chapters.

With this year's theme, “The Heart of Entrepreneurship,” the day-long event explored the deeply human aspects of building ventures—courage, creativity, clarity, and resilience, organizers said in a press release October 16, 2025.

“This was a very unique conference in the sense that it was very different from a typical entrepreneurial conference,” said President of TiE Boston Purnanand Sarma. “It went straight into the heart of entrepreneurship—what drives people to build, take risks, and overcome adversity. The attendance was fantastic, and the energy was undeniable. We want to keep up this momentum and continue offering something truly unique every year.”

The event kicked off with a keynote conversation between Nitin Nohria, former Dean of Harvard Business School and now Partner and Chairman at Thrive



PHOTO: TiE BOSTON

An estimated 450 entrepreneurs gathered for the TiECON East 2025 event.

Capital, and Steve Papa, founder of Parallel Wireless and Endeca.

“Steve Papa has scaled multiple companies, built category-defining technologies, and shaped global industries,” said Dr. Atul Dhir, TiECON East 2025 Co-Chair. “The opportunity to hear him in conversation with Nitin Nohria—a thought leader on leadership and performance—was a rare gift for entrepreneurs at any stage.”

Added Dhir: “In addition to exploring the inner mindset and the creative side

of entrepreneurship, we had a powerful session on the breakthrough technologies in mRNA and the evolving AI technology ecosystem.”

Another major highlight was the afternoon keynote by Massachusetts Secretary of Economic Development Eric Paley, who brought a storied public and private sector experience to the discussion. As the newly appointed Secretary of the Executive Office of Economic Development and former Managing Partner at Founder

Collective, Paley shared insights on growing the state's innovation economy and how entrepreneurs can help drive impact at scale.

“From navigating uncertainty to building with resilience, our speakers exemplified the emotional and intellectual depth that entrepreneurship demands,” said Co-Chair of TiECON East 2025 Satish Bhat. “Beyond the talks, the environment—the Innovation Showcase, networking lounges, breakout sessions—was charged with creative energy and collaboration.”

The Innovation Spotlight featured over 20 early-stage startups innovating in AI, digital health, robotics, and cross-border ventures to highlight what TiE considers the next wave of bold ideas and ambitious founders. Attendees traveled from across the U.S. and India to attend.

“Boston and New York chapters have developed a unique synergy,” said Jignesh Patel, President of TiE New York. “This partnership has brought new energy and reach to TiECON East, and we're excited to keep building together. Other chapters should absolutely look to this as a model.”

Panel topics ranged from creative leadership and emotional resilience to technology's role in social transformation.

“This year's theme really resonated,” said Dr. Dhir. “We didn't just talk about product-market fit or capital strategy. We focused on the mindset, the heart, and the personal grit it takes to truly innovate.”



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Florida Politician Chandler Langevin Draws Outrage Over Calls For Mass Ouster Of Indian Immigrants

By ANUMITA KAUR

A Florida city council member has drawn the ire of national Indian American groups, members of Congress and local residents after he published a stream of social media posts disparaging Indians in the United States and calling for their mass deportation.

Palm Bay council member Chandler Langevin, who was elected last year, lambasted Indians in posts on X, writing over about three weeks this fall that Indians come to the U.S. to “drain our pockets” and then return to India, “or worse ... to stay.”

Outrage over his comments has upended the community and rippled beyond it. Since Sept. 29, residents and members of regional and national Indian American groups have flooded meetings at Palm Bay’s city council chambers, released statements denouncing his remarks and demanded his resignation.

Late Thursday, Langevin’s fellow council members voted 3-2 to censure him. “We’re all overwhelmed by everything,” Mayor Rob Medina, who is a member of the council, said during the meeting. “This nation was founded on immigrants. ... We are all part of the very fabric of the flag, our banner, the United States of America.”

National advocacy group Hindus for Human Rights has published a letter calling on Gov. Ron DeSantis (R) – who under Florida law has the power to suspend municipal officials – to remove Langevin from office. At an Oct. 2 council meeting, Bharat Patel, the former chair of the Asian American Hotel Owners Association, said the council member’s remarks “echo some of history’s darkest rhetoric,” potentially even inspiring acts of violence. Prashant Patel, president of the Indian American Business Association and Chamber, told council members that Langevin’s actions are deeply polarizing.

In a phone call with The Washington Post on Wednesday, Langevin said he had aimed to start “discourse” about immigration policies. “I’m not the first Republican to make a mean tweet,” he said.

Palm Bay, on Florida’s eastern coast, has also sent a letter to DeSantis demanding that he remove Langevin from



Palm Bay, Florida, City Councilman Chandler Langevin.

office. DeSantis’s office has not responded to the letter nor to The Post’s requests for comment.

Meanwhile, local and national Republican Party members, including the Brevard County Republican Party, Rep. Mike Haridopolos (Florida) and Sen. Rick Scott (Florida), have also denounced Langevin’s rhetoric.

“Even though Mr. Langevin is a registered Republican, his views are his, and his alone and in no way reflect the views of the Brevard Republican Party,” Brevard County Republican Party chairman Rick Lacey said in a statement. “We applaud the overwhelming majority vote of the Palm Bay City Council to request Governor DeSantis suspend Mr. Langevin from his office. ... Hate like this has no place in our county.”

Langevin said the city council’s censure, calls for his removal and condemnation from fellow Republicans are “reprehensible” and represent a stifling of different viewpoints. He added that he has no intention of abdicating his seat.

“I’m not going anywhere,” he said.

It’s unclear how many Indians live in Palm Bay, the largest city in Brevard County, which voted overwhelmingly for President Donald Trump in last year’s election. About 2 percent of the city’s roughly 135,000 residents identify as Asian, Census data show. There are no telltale

signs of an established Indian community: The nearest Indian restaurant appears to be one town over, in Melbourne, and there appear to be no Indian grocers in the area.

About 5 million people in the U.S. identified as Indian in 2023, but little of that population lives in Florida. The population was just shy of 210,000 in the state as of 2024, according to AAPI Data, a nonpartisan research group focused on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.

When asked why he homed in on the Indian community despite its slim presence in his city and state, Langevin told The Post he would respond in writing. He did not.

Langevin posted at least five derogatory comments about Indians on X beginning in mid-September, including one in which he accused Indians of “destroying the South.”

On Sept. 26, Langevin shared a post from the Department of Homeland Security about an Indian truck driver the agency accused of causing an accident that killed a woman. “Deport every Indian immediately,” he wrote in his repost.

The agency’s post came days after a separate incident in which a commercial truck driver, a California resident from India, was accused of killing three people on a Florida highway. DHS, DeSantis and California Gov. Gavin Newsom (D) clashed over the incident, and the Trump administration soon toughened rules for noncitizens to obtain commercial driver’s licenses.

As Langevin posted anti-Indian remarks on social media, Medina, the city’s mayor, published a message to the city on Sept. 29, assuring residents that “words that demean or devalue others have no place in the Palm Bay we aspire to be.”

The city council held a special session the next evening, where residents packed the town hall forum to air concerns about Langevin.

Langevin was undeterred. He posted on X on Oct. 2: “Today is my birthday and all I want is for @realDonaldTrump to revoke every Indian visa and deport them immediately. America for Americans”

-THE WASHINGTON POST

Former National Security Council Staffer Charged Under Espionage Act

By SALVADOR RIZZO

An adviser to the Defense and State departments known as a leading expert on Indian and South Asian affairs has been charged with violating the Espionage Act by retaining more than 1,000 pages of records with classified markings at his home.

Ashley J. Tellis, who had served on the National Security Council during President George W. Bush’s administration and as a senior adviser to the U.S. ambassador in India, was arrested Saturday after the FBI raided his home in Vienna, Virginia, finding hundreds of pages with classification markings in the basement, according to court records.

Tellis was charged with unlawful retention of national defense information, for which the maximum sentence is 10 years in prison. His attorneys said they “will be vigorously contesting the allegations brought against him.”

A naturalized U.S. citizen who was born in India, Tellis had a top-secret security clearance through his dual roles as an unpaid senior counselor to the State Department and contractor with the Defense Department’s Office of

Net Assessment, a think tank within the Pentagon. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said this year that the office was being abolished.

According to an FBI affidavit, U.S. officials had been investigating Tellis for years. He was spotted having dinner with Chinese officials in Northern Virginia on at least four occasions from 2022 to last month and was overheard discussing Iranian-Chinese relations, the U.S.-Pakistan relationship and emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, an FBI agent said in the court filing.

Tellis arrived at a dinner in 2022 with a manila envelope that he did not appear to have upon departing, the FBI filing says. At a dinner last month in Fairfax, Chinese officials gave Tellis a red gift bag, the document says.

A federal magistrate judge in Alexandria, Virginia, granted a request from federal prosecutors to hold Tellis in jail until a detention hearing scheduled for Oct. 21. The State Department referred questions to the FBI.

Tellis, 64, has published several books and studies on India’s role as a nuclear power and was also serving as a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace at the time of the arrest. He is now on administrative leave from the organization, a Carnegie

spokeswoman confirmed Wednesday.

In a statement responding to the accusations Wednesday, Tellis’s attorneys said he had built a reputation as a widely respected scholar and senior policy adviser to the U.S. government.

“At the next court hearing in the Eastern District of Virginia on Tuesday and in our related filings on Monday, we will be vigorously contesting the allegations brought against him, specifically any insinuation of his operating on behalf of a foreign adversary,” attorneys Deborah Curtis and John Nassikas said.

In the charging documents filed in U.S. District Court, officials said Tellis had printed hundreds of pages of classified records at Defense and State facilities in the Washington region since last month, including more than 350 pages from a document that bore markings showing that it was classified at the “secret” level and contained risk-sensitive information from a foreign government that had been obtained under the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act.

-THE WASHINGTON POST



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Pratham Chicago Gala 2025 Celebrates Compassion And Community Spirit

By BHAILAL M. PATEL

The Pratham Chicago Gala 2025, held on Saturday, October 11, at the iconic Palmer House Hilton, brought together philanthropists, business leaders, educators, and well-wishers — all united by a shared vision: to ensure that every child in India learns, earns, and thrives.

This year's celebration raised vital funds to empower more than 8,000 children through learning, organizers said, to meet the non-profit's mission to advance educational equity across India.

The Gala honored Pratham's far-reaching impact — uplifting millions of children, youth, and women through education, skill-building, and empowerment. Guests were deeply moved by visual stories and testimonies showcasing how Pratham's approach is transforming lives across India's villages and cities.

Keynote speaker Rattan L. Khosa, P.E., delivered a moving address full of purpose and hope.

A spirited performance by Vik Pandya, the nationally touring comedian who served as emcee, injected humor and warmth to the evening.

Special appreciation was extended to Pratham Chicago President Nag Vaidyanathan and the Pratham Chicago Board for their leadership and dedication. Grateful acknowledgment was also given to the evening's major sponsors — AM-SYSCO and Allstate.

The highlight of the evening was the performance by Vidya Vox, the well-known Indian-American singer and YouTube sensation. Known for her signature fusion of Bollywood and Western pop, Vidya echoed Pratham's spirit — bridging borders, innovation, heritage, and unity, her popularity evident in the 1 billion YouTube views and 7 million subscribers, she has amassed.



The Pratham Chicago Gala special guests Rattan L. Khosa, P.E., who delivered a deeply impactful keynote speech, and Vik Pandya, nationally touring stand up comic and our emcee for the evening.



Scenes from the Pratham fundraising gala in Chicago October 11, 2025.

Founded on the belief that “learning changes everything,” Pratham's award-winning Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) model — recognized globally by The World Bank and UNICEF — continues to change children's early education, helping them quickly master essential reading and math skills, addressing a global learning crisis that affects 70% of 10-year-olds in low- and middle-income countries.

Another highlight was Pratham's Second Chance Program, which offers girls and women the opportunity to complete their secondary education in a flexible, supportive environment.

Since 2011, more than 50,000 women have earned their Grade 10 certification through this initiative. The program blends academic preparation with life-skills training, digital literacy, health awareness, and financial education.

India is home to one-fifth of the world's youth — yet nearly half lack the skills needed for employment, Pratham estimates. Its Youth Skilling Programs bridge this gap by equipping young people with practical training, linking them to job opportunities, and fostering economic empowerment.

Guests enjoyed a dinner and networking opportunities.

“Together, we are creating brighter futures for children across India and beyond,” said a spokesperson for Pratham Chicago. “This gala is not just a celebration — it's a movement of compassion and commitment.”

Founded in 1995, Pratham is one of India's largest and most respected non-governmental organizations (NGOs) dedicated to improving education quality and equity, through community-based solutions, measurable outcomes, and strong global partnerships.

Those interested in the mission of this non-profit can visit www.prathamusa.org.

NATIONAL AFFAIRS

California Makes Diwali A State Holiday

By A STAFF WRITER

On October 6, 2025, California Governor Gavin Newsom signed into law Assembly Bill 268, making Diwali a state holiday. AB 268 was authored jointly by Democratic Assembly members Ash Kalra of San Jose and Dr. Darshana Patel of San Diego.

California, which according an estimate by non-profit organization Indiaspora, houses one million Indian Americans, becomes the largest state to declare Diwali a state holiday. It is preceded only Pennsylvania a year ago, and by New

York City in November 2024, as a public school holiday, and some of the jurisdictions in New York State. Which makes California the first to make it a state-wide law.

“Today, with California—the most populous state in the nation—officially recognizing Diwali, Indian Americans celebrate a major milestone in the ongoing journey toward greater cultural inclusion and visibility,” declared Indiaspora in an October 7, press release. “This landmark legislation marks a historic moment for Indian Americans, especially in California, and is a powerful recognition of the community's rich cultural heritage and longstanding contributions to the Golden State,” the organization added.



One of several cultural performances at the Nov. 5, 2023 Diwali celebrations in Sacramento, California.

ASTROLOGY



This week for you

E-mail: psharma@premaastrologer.com Contact No - 01147033152/40532026

ARIES: This week brings favourable outcomes in health and finances. Invest wisely to make the most of opportunities. Adding nutrient-rich foods and supplements can boost your well-being. Career prospects look bright. Romance may vary, but some could move toward engagement. Travel plans may face hurdles. Spending time with children or elders will be rewarding. Property possession may come earlier than expected, while academic focus ensures improved results.

TAURUS: Taurus natives may enjoy financial security this week, with salary hikes or promotions likely. Celebrations within the family bring joy and togetherness. Though finances remain favourable, health demands attention—adopt healthier habits to stay fit. On the romantic side, couples may need to improve communication for harmony. Students aiming for top universities must work on raising their scores. Property matters may see progress, while adventurous souls could explore new cuisines and cultures through travel.

GEMINI: This week brings promising opportunities for Gemini natives. Fresh graduates may find excellent job openings. Focus on fitness. The romantic front is set to blossom, with proposals for some. Family life shines with joyful get-togethers, helping ease conflicts. Be mindful with money, as new property investments could involve risks. Domestic or spiritual trips bring satisfaction and peace. Students may receive scholarships, while socially, the week offers plenty of engaging interactions.

CANCER: Cancer natives can expect growth and positivity this week. Smart investments in shares or assets can strengthen wealth. Health receives a boost through expert guidance. Love grows stronger. Home life feels harmonious, and leadership opportunities may come your way. Work prospects look encouraging. Property dealings could bring good profits. However, travel plans may not be favourable right now.

LEO: Leos may enjoy good health this week by embracing yoga, fitness, and balanced meals. Domestic happiness grows, and reunions bring cheer. Romantic life may see consistency but face occasional challenges. Professional growth might slow due to heavy workloads and delayed recognition. On the brighter side, opportunities in property, relocation, or home renovation may arise. Travel plans could finally come true, while academic progress remains strong with scholarship chances for some.

VIRGO: Virgos are likely to reap rewards for consistent efforts this week. Professional recognition from superiors boosts confidence. Health remains stable. Romance could be fulfilling, with surprises from your partner. Financially, smart stock investments may prove fruitful. Family matters could feel strained. Balancing personal and work life becomes essential. Budget-friendly travel may help.

LIBRA: Libras can expect lively family moments this week, making home the centre of joy. Financial progress may come through wise plans and successful investments. Romance may flourish, with date nights bringing cherished memories. Stress management and fitness routines enhance health. Work life looks bright, offering growth. Promising property deals could be discovered, while students may achieve progress in academics. Unplanned trips might create stress.

SCORPIO: Scorpios may witness financial growth through smart investments. Career prospects appear stronger with timely completion of tasks. Even if health needs attention, regular exercise and relaxation can keep things balanced. Family bonds strengthen. Romance may face ups and downs due to misunderstandings. Property goals could be within reach with proper planning. Academics show progress, and a short trip may refresh the mind.

SAGITTARIUS: Sagittarians may strike a balance between energy and composure this week. Professional achievements look promising, and a favourable transfer may come through. Family gatherings and visits create happiness at home. Romance shines, with blessings for marriage or deeper commitments. Financial dealings like borrowing or investing may not be wise right now. Adventure lovers may find joy in forest trails or trekking. Property purchases become easier with good loan options. Despite financial caution, overall progress seems steady.

CAPRICORN: Capricorns may experience career advancement and growth this week. A promotion could improve finances and family life. Money management ensures stability, but responsibilities of caring for elders may weigh on you. Emotional challenges in love may arise due to unreciprocated feelings. Still, health remains positive. Renovations or home upgrades may materialize, while travel offers fresh perspectives. Students can benefit by learning stress management techniques for improved focus.

AQUARIUS: Aquarius natives may enjoy overall stability this week. Excellent health supports progress in all areas of life. Career growth looks favourable. Finances remain steady, though caution is advised. Romance may thrive with date nights or trips, while family disputes may require careful mediation. Be a guiding influence for younger family members. Property-related ventures, could succeed. Prioritizing wellness pays off.

PISCES: This week is a blend of positives and challenges. Romance remains fulfilling, and family brings peace. Finances look strong. Healthy routines ensure well-being. Professionally, delays and pressures could frustrate some. Long-awaited travel may finally happen. Property possession may arrive sooner than expected. Academics may need extra focus. The week encourages finding balance between work and personal happiness.



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Tracing Diwali Rituals And Traditions In Ancient Literature

By ARCHANA ADALJA

This Diwali, as you hang a green garland on your front door, do you feel that someone else did this somewhere in time? Someone much before your parents and their parents' time, someone from more than 2,500 years ago?

That is when it all began in India. Part of the harvest festivals, Diwali celebrations were presided over by kings with their kingdoms decorated with diyas and flowers, and general festivities observed.

Diwali is mentioned in the Puranas, part of the scriptures which are illustrative commentaries on the four Vedas, featuring detailed rituals to be performed during the festival, which some celebrated as a five-day festival, while some celebrated as a three-day festival.

Diwali is mentioned in the *Padma Purana* and the *Skanda Purana*, both composed between the 7th and 10th centuries. Traditionally, there are 18 Mukhya Puranas and 18 Upa Puranas, with over 400,000 verses describing gods and goddesses. While Skanda Purana is dedicated to Skanda, also known as Kartikeya or Murugan, Padma Purana is dedicated to the lotus on which Brahma, the creator appeared.

DIWALI IN SKANDA PURANA:

Diwali is mentioned in the Kartika Masa Mahatmya and Deepavali chapters of the Vaishnava Khanda of the Skanda Purana.

According to the Wisdom Library, <https://www.wisdomlib.org/>, Skanda Purana contains 81,000 Sanskrit metric verses. It covers varied topics including cosmogony (creation of the universe), mythology (itihasa), genealogy (vamsha), dharma (virtuous lifestyle), festivals (yatra etc.), geography, gemology, and also with detailed instructions pilgrimage guides (Tirtha Mahatmya).

The Skanda Purana describes detailed rituals to be performed on Govatsa Dwadashi (the 12th of the lunar month), Dhan Teras, Narak Chaturdashi, and Diwali.

In his English translation of the Skanda Purana, G.V. Tagare (1950), <https://archive.org/>, describes in Chapter 9, the tradition of lighting diyas.

After describing how to worship a calf and a cow on Vats Dwadashi, in lines 5-6, the Purana speaks of lighting of lamps.

At the outset many lamps are lit. They are then placed in golden vessels etc. Then the rite of Nijana should be performed and the omens observed. Then he should take all the lamps and place them facing the North. The important lamps are said to be nine. He should have others too.

Line 10 describes diyas as symbols of the Sun, which it describes as the cosmic source of light and energy which transitions in the month of Kartika.

'Lamps are born of parts of the Sun. They are the dispellers of darkness. Let them illuminate me in all the three units of time and let them indicate auspiciousness or otherwise.'

The Skanda Purana describes Chaturdashi and Amavasya as a festival of "showing the path to the Pitrus" (ancestors), with people lighting firecrackers to help the spirits of the deceased find their way.

The Skanda Purana also links the story of the asura king Bali who was tricked into going into Pataal by Vishnu in a Vamana (dwarf) avatar, but was promised three days on earth which later came to be celebrated as Deepavali festival of diyas, new clothes, good food and other celebrations. In lines 49b-55, it describes Bali asking the boon of his presence on earth for three days in a year.

If you are competent, grant it unto me. Today the earth was gifted to you who are in the false guise of

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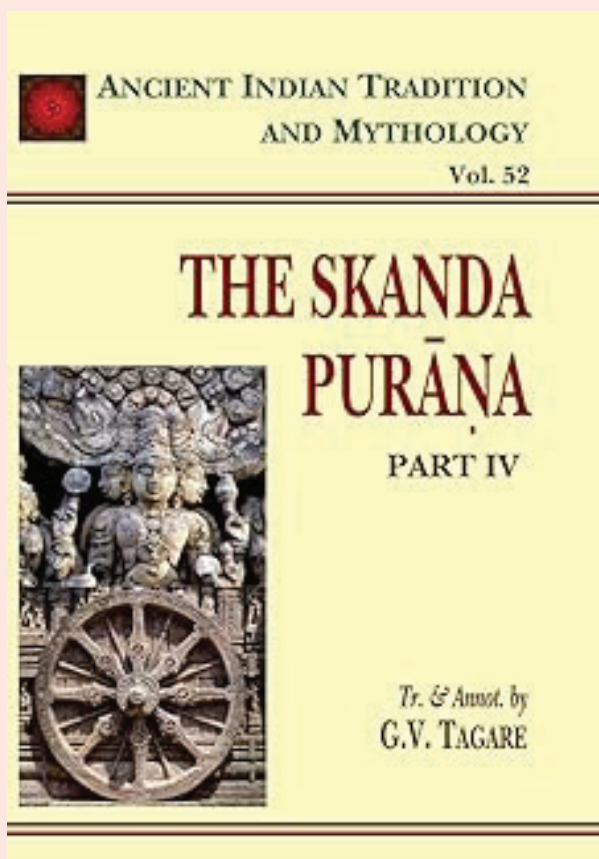


Many Diyas lit up for Diwali night.

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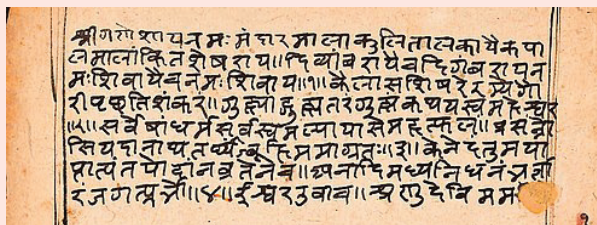


A row of Diyas lighted up for Diwali.



Book Cover of G.V. Tagare's English Translation of the Skanda Purana.

PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS SHARE
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A page in Sanskrit written in Devnagari script from the Padma Purana.

a Dwarf. Since that has been taken over by you by means of three steps in the course of three days, let there be my rule on the earth for three days, O Hari. Let this lady, your wife (Lakm), stay permanently in the house of those people who offer lamps in my kingdom on the earth.

Skanda Purana also prescribes how to worship Lakshmi and how to invite wealth with details of offerings to be made. Firecrackers, food and new clothes, and lights are mentioned in lines 91-97.

'Light-trees' should be made according to one's capacity in temples etc., quadrangles, cremation grounds, rivers, mountains, houses, roots of trees, cowpens, levelled square-shaped plots of sacrifice, etc. The grounds along highway should be decorated and beautified with cloths and flowers.

DIWALI IN PADMA PURANA:

Similar rituals are also prescribed in Padma Purana which has more than 50,000 verses. Diwali is mentioned in the last part, called Uttarakhanda which contains, among other things, legends and mythologies of Indian festivals.

In lines 4-20 of Chapter 122 named The Celebration of Dipavali of his English translation of Padma Purana (1951) <https://archive.org/>, N.A. Deshpande, describes the importance of lighting diyas.

Then at the break of night he should offer pleasing lights at the temples of Brahm, Viu, iva etc., and especially at apartments on the tops of the houses, sanctuaries, assembly halls, rivers, ramparts, gardens, wells, streets, pleasure-groves near houses, stables and abodes of elephants also.

Lakshmi is described as living in the cowpen on earth on the auspicious day of Dipavali in Krtika. The day after Dipavali is the first day of the new year in Padma Purana, and rituals are prescribed for it in lines 21-32.

Lines 33-42 prescribe rituals to be performed which include worshipping the deities and good men, and distributing food, gentle words, garments, tmbas, lights, flowers, camphor, saffron, food and eatables, and special gifts to the village chief and soldiers. Further lines of the chapter also describe how a special floral arch should be created, decorated with different flowers, and offerings of eatables with jaggery and sweetened milk to be made.

HARSHA'S LITERARY PLAY:

In one of the earliest literary documentation of Diwali, the ancient Sanskrit play *Nagananda* by Harshvardhana describes detailed rituals of Deepapratipadotsava in an interlude of Act IV. The play is written by the emperor Harshavardhana (606 - 647 CE).

In a dialogue between the chamberlain of King Vishvasu and the doorkeeper, the royal and domestic traditions of the festival are described, wherein the royal family exchange gifts with each other, newly married couples also exchange gifts and many lamps being lit.

FINALLY,

Literature has always reflected culture of the period in which it is composed. Although thousands of years far in time, Harsha's play does not seem so far. One still remembers studying Harsha's *Ratnavali* in college, while friends happily learned the easier French language.

This time-related reference to the festival assures one that the world has been going on for thousands of years. But whether it will go on for thousands of years more seems to be in one's own hand now, isn't it? Cultural traditions must be saved. Mankind must be saved. And the Earth must be saved. Perhaps this Diwali, it is time to choose a part in this saving game.

Indian Americans In Aurora, Illinois, Enjoy Diwali Celebrations Attended By Thousands

BY A STAFF WRITER

An estimated 3,000 people gathered on North Eola Road in Aurora, Illinois, October 15, 2025, to celebrate the Festival of Lights, turning the venue into a colorful hub. Attendees sported resplendent saris, lehengas, and kurtas, and the air was infused with the aroma of Indian spices, and street foods like chaat, and sweets.

Some 45 vendors did brisk business with their good including jewelry, clothes, and services, a press release from Asian Media USA said.

The event was organized by the Indian American Community Outreach Advisory Board (IACOAB).

Festivities began early, with vendors preparing before dawn and the cultural program commencing at 3 p.m. The celebration opened with IACOAB Chair Nitin Fuldeore lighting a traditional diya, and delivering a speech encouraging the crowd to “spread joy and positivity,” expressing heartfelt appreciation for the volunteers, the more than ten sponsors, and dozens of vendors.

Aurora Mayor John Leasch video address was played. His speech invoked the ancient Ramayana tale of Rama’s victory over Ravana to highlight Diwali’s enduring message of good triumphing over evil. “The City of Lights can shine as a symbol of hope,” he said, in a challenging time.

Congressman Bill Foster shared his admiration for the festival and the community. “Diwali’s light is a global necessity, and seeing young people uphold this tradition is a highlight of my year,” Foster said. Representing the Consulate General of India in Chicago was M.S. Chauhan who emphasized the festival’s universal message: “Diwali unites us in celebrating India’s rich cultural tapestry.”



Above and below, performances at the Diwali celebrations in Aurora, Illinois, October 15, 2025, hosted by the Indian American Community Outreach Advisory Board.



The audience erupted in applause as Ward 10 Alderwoman Shweta Baid, Aurora’s first Indian-American elected official, delivered an inspiring message celebrating the city’s diversity and inclusion.

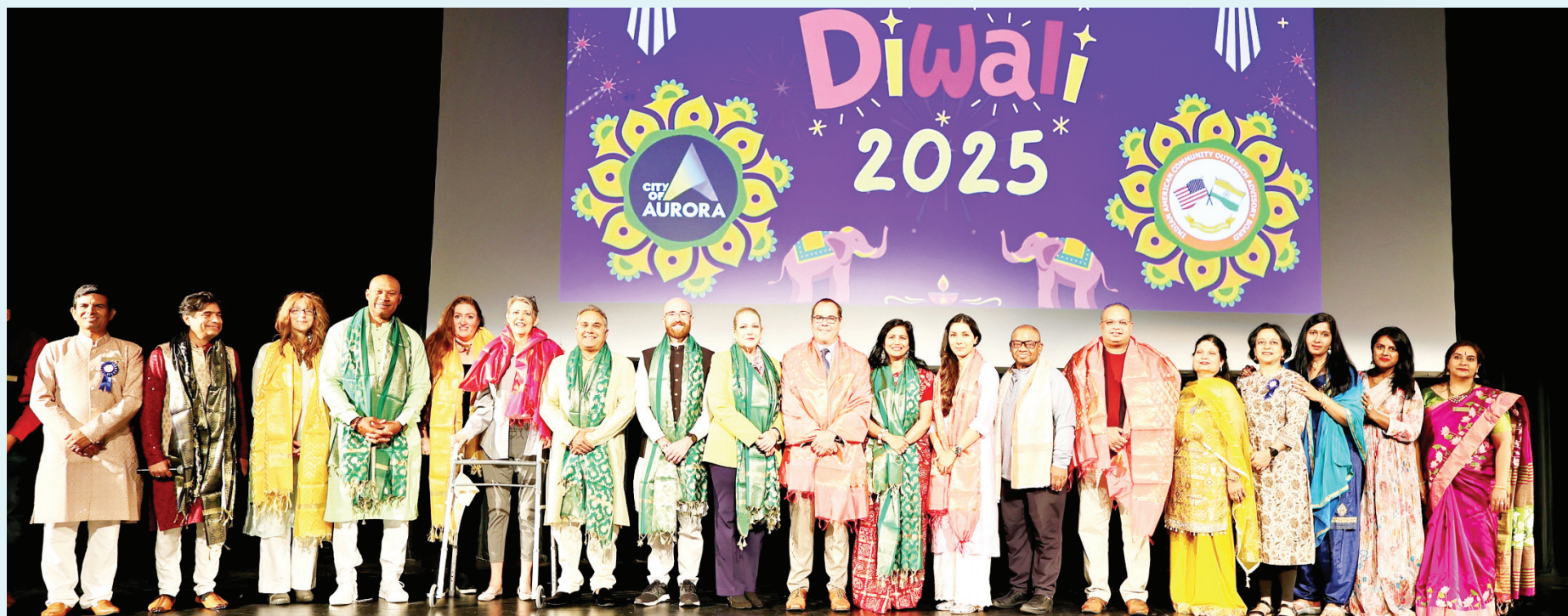
The cultural program was a mix of classical and contemporary performances — from soulful singing and expressive dances to instrumental ensembles that bridged East and West. Highlights included tabla and saxophone jugalbandi (a traditional Indian musical duet) and an energetic rendition of the Bollywood favorite “Jai Ho,” which had the crowd clapping in rhythm.

Since its inception in 2014, the volunteer-driven IACOAB has elevated Aurora’s Diwali celebration into a cornerstone of the city’s cultural calendar. Former Chair Gautam Bhatia reflected on the board’s journey: “Seeing this event thrive post-pandemic is deeply gratifying,” Bhatia said.

Mayor Leasch presented an official proclamation honoring the IACOAB for its contributions to community harmony, noting that “Diwali, known as the Festival of Lights, is celebrated by over a billion people worldwide, symbolizing the victory of dharma, light over darkness, and good over evil.”

The Community Foundation of the Fox River Valley was recognized for its ongoing scholarship partnership with IACOAB. In 2025 alone, ten students received \$10,000 in scholarships, contributing to a total of \$49,000 awarded to 49 students over the past eight years. CEO Julie Christman lauded the board’s commitment, earning a standing ovation: “They work so hard and do such wonderful work to uplift young scholars.”

In her vote of thanks, Nadia Kanhai acknowledged School District 204, custodial and AV staff, more than 30 volunteers, sponsors, vendors, and the thousands of attendees. Mayor Leasch concluded the celebration by inviting guests to experience Aurora’s downtown Festival of Lights, running till October 26.



Key organizers, speakers, and dignitaries at the Oct. 15, 2025, Diwali celebrations in Aurora, Illinois.

PERMANENT RESIDENT

Five Growing Risks for Green Card Holders in 2025

IN MEMORIAM

By David H. Nachman, Esq.

All Photos: Canva



Michael Phulwani



David Nachman



Ludka Zimovcak



Snehal Batra

Permanent residence in the United States has always been viewed as a stable immigration status. However, recent policy changes and stricter enforcement trends have made it clear that even lawful permanent residents (LPRs) — or “green card holders” — are now facing closer scrutiny when traveling, filing for citizenship, or renewing status.

Here are five key areas that green card holders should pay special attention to in 2025 and beyond.

1. DUI Convictions

A single driving under the influence (DUI) offense can now trigger serious immigration consequences. While one conviction may not automatically make a green card holder deportable, Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers have increasingly detained returning residents with past DUIs during airport inspections.

In some cases, individuals with old DUI convictions have been held in secondary inspection or denied reentry until further review. Those with multiple DUIs may face additional hurdles when applying for U.S. citizenship, as such cases often raise questions about “good moral character.”

NPZ Tip: Green card holders with a prior DUI should consult both an immigration attorney and a criminal defense lawyer before traveling internationally or applying for naturalization.

2. Repeated Speeding or Traffic Violations

While isolated traffic tickets generally do not affect immigration status, multiple violations — especially three or more — can raise red flags when applying for citizenship. Under recent USCIS guidance, patterns of repeated disregard for traffic laws may be viewed as evidence of poor judgment or lack of moral character. **NPZ Tip:** Resolve all unpaid citations before filing any application with USCIS. Bring documentation showing corrective action, such as completion of defensive driving courses or community service.

3. Failure to File or Pay Taxes

Tax compliance has become an important factor in immigration evaluations. Green card holders who fail to file tax returns or have unresolved IRS debts may be seen as failing to meet their legal obligations. This can delay or derail naturalization applications — and, in rare cases, trigger secondary inspection upon return from international travel.

NPZ Tip: Keep clear records of all tax filings and, if necessary, set up a formal payment plan with the IRS before applying for U.S. citizenship.

4. Extended Travel Abroad

Staying outside the United States for long periods — particularly more than one year — can be interpreted as abandoning permanent residence. Even shorter absences may invite questioning if officers believe a person’s “real home” is abroad. **NPZ Tip:** If you must remain outside the U.S. for an extended period, apply for a re-entry permit before departure and maintain strong ties to the U.S. (home lease, tax filings, bank accounts). Never sign Form I-407 (Record of Abandonment of Lawful Permanent Resident Status) under pressure.

5. Social Media and Political Speech

In the digital age, online posts and protest photos can surface during immigration reviews. Officers now cross-check applicants’ social media activity to assess background and credibility. While lawful political expression is protected, inflammatory or extremist content may cause unnecessary scrutiny during travel or citizenship interviews.

NPZ Tip: Be thoughtful about your public online activity and know that social media posts can become part of your immigration record.

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NPZ Guidance

At NPZ Law Group, we are seeing a clear pattern: green card holders are now subject to tighter review than ever before — especially during travel and citizenship processing.

Our attorneys assist clients in understanding these risks, gathering proper documentation, and responding effectively if concerns arise during inspection or adjudication.

If you are a permanent resident with prior legal issues, tax concerns, or long absences from the United States, contact NPZ for a confidential consultation.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

1. Can a single DUI cause deportation?

Not usually by itself, but it can cause reentry delays or additional scrutiny at ports of entry and may affect future naturalization.

2. Do unpaid traffic tickets matter for immigration?

Yes. Multiple or unresolved citations can create problems in citizenship applications and sometimes appear in background checks.

3. How long can I stay outside the U.S. as a green card holder?

Trips over six months raise questions; trips over one year can be viewed as abandoning residence unless you hold a valid re-entry permit.

4. What happens if I haven't paid my taxes?

Tax issues can impact your “good moral character” evaluation. Resolve outstanding matters with the IRS before applying for citizenship.

5. Can my social media posts affect my immigration status?

Potentially, yes. Officers may review public information to assess conduct or affiliations during background checks.

Contact Information

If you or your family members have any questions about how immigration and nationality laws in the United States may affect you, or if you want to access additional information about immigration and nationality laws in the United States or Canada, please do not hesitate to contact the immigration and nationality lawyers at NPZ Law Group.

You can reach us by emailing info@visaserve.com or by calling us at 201-670-0006 extension 104.

We also invite you to visit our website at www.visaserve.com for more information.

Is Diwali As A Public School Holiday Enough, Parents Ask

By ARCHANA ADALJA

The much looked forward to holiday of Diwali in Public Schools is here in New York. School-goers and their parents have mixed feelings about it.

News India Times spoke to Dr. Vrutti Dave-Shukla of Roslyn, NY; Kalpita Parikh of Flushing, NY; Ruta Dave from Syosset, NY; Shreya Mehta from Jericho, NY; Kavita Pathak from Los Angeles, CA; Brinda Soneji from Manhasset Hills, NY; Shraddha Patel from Los Angeles, CA; and Dharini Trivedi of Roslyn, NY. They all said the school holiday is only a first step and their task of devising newer ways of bringing Indian culture to the friends and classmates of their children has to continue.

APPRECIATION AND IMPACT OF THE DIWALI SCHOOL HOLIDAY

The Diwali school holiday has been mainly appreciated for offering time together to celebrate as a family.

"They love that we can spend the day together celebrating our traditions," said Dr. Vrutti Dave-Shukla. "It makes it easier to celebrate fully, from decorating and cooking to connecting with family without feeling rushed or having to choose between school and cultural traditions," she said.

IMPACT OF DIWALI SCHOOL HOLIDAY

Conversations about Diwali seem to have increased. Interest and curiosity among the children's classmates and friends about what Diwali is, how it is celebrated and the activities to engage through the day have definitely increased after the holiday became official.

Dave-Shukla said she has noticed a lot more curiosity and thoughtful questions about Diwali, about how it is celebrated and about the meaning and tradition of it. "It's been heartwarming to see friends and neighbors take such an interest and want to join in the spirit of the celebration," she said.

She has also noticed a new interest among classmates to whom she reads a Diwali book, does Rangoli craft, shares bindis and bangles, and distributes Gulab Jamuns annually. "The kids were so enthusiastic and genuinely curious. They embraced every part of it with excitement and joy," Dave-Shukla said.

Kalpita Parikh of Flushing, NY, said her daughter's classmates have been asking about Diwali now. Parikh has been visiting them on Diwali for years bearing gifts, she said. Parikh has also noticed more curiosity in her own daughter now with questions about days of Diwali festival and different foods in different regions of India.

DIWALI AS SCHOOL HOLIDAY IS NOT ENOUGH

Most of the mothers said they felt Diwali holiday alone does not ensure increased understanding of Indian culture. Kavita Pathak feels awareness of



Dr. Vrutti Dave-Shukla conducting a Diwali Workshop for her daughter's class.

Indian culture is still far. "I think we still have a long way to go where the teachers take initiative to carve out time with the kids in the Diwali teaching and celebration," Pathak said.

Brinda Soneji is skeptical. "Even though this is now a school holiday, educators and administrators are still

hesitant to host school wide knowledge sharing workshops to bring awareness for all students," she said, adding, "We have a long way to go".

Others said they have had to tiptoe around the cultural and religious aspect of Diwali in the school system which is supposed to teach tolerance and acceptance of all cultures.

TIME TO BUILD ON DIWALI SCHOOL HOLIDAY

Perhaps what is required is building on the momentum of this excitement and impact to usher in more awareness about Indian culture.

A good sign is that communities have now become more open and multicultural according to Dave-Shukla. She spoke about her daughter wearing a bindi in school and telling her friends about Diwali. "Watching her share her culture so confidently felt really special. I don't think I felt as comfortable doing that when I was growing up. It's a beautiful sign of how much more inclusive and open our communities have become," Shukla said.

EDUCATING THROUGH PERSONAL EXAMPLE

It also seems that, for real impact, the Diwali school holiday has to go hand-in-hand with educating through personal example, following cultural traditions at home, talking about customs, recounting memories of childhood celebrations, cooking special food items, and bringing in the lights, new clothes, sparklers, diyas, sweets, guests, uncles and aunts, and more.

Ruta Dave has been part of the committee advocating for Diwali to be recog-



Brinda Soneji with her daughter's class conducting a Diwali workshop.

nized as a holiday of the Syosset School Board and of New York Mayor. Dave spoke about her grown children following the customs set at home. "We do our Lakshmi Pooja, decorate the house, visit the temple on New Year's Day, and we've even started giving gifts to the kids on Diwali instead of Christmas, so they understand the significance of our festival of lights," Dave said..

Shreya Mehta is a second generation Indian American born and raised in a non-diverse community of Berkshire, with 8th and 5th grader children. "I'm making a more conscience effort to educate myself and ensure I pass on the knowledge of what each day means and why we celebrate it," Mehta said.

Mehta follows a regime of spending the days of Diwali together as a family. "I see it as a big step forward than what I grew up with, but there is still a long way to go. Still, it's paving the path for the future".

Soneji has created a deck this year for second graders, discussing how Diwali is different in different parts of India and outside of India. (<https://www.instagram.com/p/DP7EmkEDgcL/?igsh=MW54am55YXk3YXQyZQ==>). She has been getting other parents involved, making Diwali a cultural activity for the younger generation and continuing education of her own children about Diwali's religious and historical significance.

Shraddha Patel of Los Angeles, CA, has also been doing her part. She and a fellow Indian mom have been going to their sons' elementary classroom in Indian clothes and telling the story of Diwali and sharing sweets.



Kalpita Parikh's daughter Kamyra Parikh with friends donning traditional Indian clothing and going to the temple on Diwali day.

Bloomberg, The Washington Post

A \$1.2 trillion question: Can conferences be less terrible?

By Jo Constantz

If you'd wandered into the Oakland Museum of California on a Tuesday morning in mid-September, you would've found an exceptionally meta event: a conference about conferences. The gathering, geared toward event organizers who design workshops, town halls or massive conventions, started in the atrium with the typical registration line and coffee, but also a choice of conversation-starter nametags with prompts like "I have been thinking a lot about..."

Then it was onto the auditorium for the formal program, which opened, as so many events nowadays do, with a video. This one was unique in that it starred an AI-generated, talking French bulldog with an imperious voice and a black leather jacket, who promised that the takeaway today "isn't swag but the courage to break the mold" and create conferences that are worth the time, money and jet lag.

Globally, companies spend an estimated \$1.2 trillion every year on business events, according to a 2023 report by the Events Industry Council, with a sizable share allocated to professional conferences and trade shows. For host cities, the impact of even a single event can be enormous. Salesforce Inc. expected its three-day Dreamforce conference this week to bring almost 50,000 attendees and a \$130 million economic boost to San Francisco.

Much has been made of our post-pandemic craving for in-person connection, which has driven a strong post-2020 rebound. But conferences, as they're traditionally conceived and executed, often disappoint. We all have our gripes. Mine included weak coffee, clunky event apps and cryogenic AC. As AI goes mainstream, the rationale for making the trek for "professional development" seems even less clear when ChatGPT can explain niche topics in seconds with the expertise of a keynote speaker.

Sauer-Klein's indirect way of challenging the status quo was to launch her own corporate conference in 2016, focused on workplace culture. This year, she took direct aim at the conference industry itself, bringing together event organizers for companies like Google, Airbnb, AWS, TED and Sony Music.

Their goal?

To generate ideas for transforming professional gatherings "from excruciating email-checking study halls to joyful dynamic experiences of vitality, vulnerability and action," as one attendee named Liz summed up, to snaps from the audience.

To loosen everyone up for the task, Sauer-Klein instructed the participants to turn to the person next to them and draw a single-line portrait of them without looking down. The room burst into laughter at the results. My partner's portrait of me looked like a Picassoesque Davy Jones from the Pirates of the Caribbean film franchise.

The trick worked: It was fun, and the silliness carried over to a rapid-fire brainstorm of ways to fix stuffy conference formats.

"Have the keynote completely in the dark," one woman suggested, "so you're activating all the other senses." Add a truth-or-dare option to fireside chats, another attendee offered.

For the rest of the day, the medium was the message. After the morning segment, there was a choice of breakout sessions for the more than 100 attendees, who were offered opportunities to test out nontraditional formats like hackathons, "Ask Me Anything" roundtables and "unconferences" (events where the agenda is designed in the moment by attendees).

The point was to see what worked and what didn't, inspiring participants to think about how they could run their own events differently while also allowing them to learn from their peers, all of whom bring their own wealth of experience.

In the "fishbowl" session, a more democratic take on the expert panel, participants seated in an inner circle discussed a topic while those in an outer circle listened and "tapped in" when they had something to share.

The attendees tried it out with a prompt about times when the event-planning process went awry, and took turns sharing the stuff of their nightmares: a cascade

of dysfunction following a last-minute speaker cancellation or the horror of forgetting to account for dietary restrictions. I felt like I had accidentally walked into a support group. Afterward, the group talked through possible improvements: how to craft a better prompt, how to handle one person dominating the conversation. The idea behind both the session and the day's format in general was to get everyone sharing, instead of leaving the task to a person at the front with a microphone.

All Photos: Canva



At lunch in the museum courtyard, I joined a table filled with large-scale event organizers. The table reserved for "Marketing, ROI and Data-Driven Planners," I noted, was empty. The guy across from me (nametag: "I've been thinking a lot about... the lives of animals") convened community builders. Next to me was Robb Trost, a 25-plus-year industry veteran with a military-style crew cut, large biceps and a geometric forearm tattoo. He didn't fill out his name tag.

Trost fell into this line of work by chance: He took a night job deejaying in Milwaukee after college, then got

But broadly speaking, the return on business events isn't always clear cut for attendees, especially when they involve pricey travel or significant time away from the office. The Conference for Conferences acknowledged that upfront in its welcome video.

"You spend thousands flying on planes, sleeping in hotels, hiring babysitters, all to sit in a windowless ballroom, listening to content you could've watched at home on your couch," the AI bulldog intoned.

The audience laughed knowingly. "You leave overwhelmed, exhausted, haunted by the question: 'Was any of this worth it?'"

The Conference for Conferences is the brainchild of Jenny Sauer-Klein, who in a past life co-founded Acroyoga (a combination of acrobatics and yoga) and traveled the world teaching at yoga conferences. When she pivoted to the business world with a startup focused on team-building, she was horrified to find that corporate conferences, on the whole, are awful.

The buttoned-up events she encountered were a long way off from the experiential learning she enjoyed at community-oriented yoga gatherings. "I got to those conferences and I was like, 'Oh no, this is terrible,'" she said. "I felt deep rage."

recruited for a gig with a pirate radio station - his first "experiential marketing" stunt.

These days, he organizes big-budget conferences and events as a senior director for InVision Communications, negotiating with CEOs who insist on tight timelines and quixotic headliner acts (everyone wants Coldplay now, apparently).

Like many attendees, the part of Trost's brain trained to evaluate choices in event design whirled in the background. His bugaboo was the confusing parking lot entrance.

(Mine was the coffee - we weren't allowed to bring it into the auditorium.) Others suggested slowing the tempo with more breathing room between sessions. Quibbles aside, the question Trost kept coming back to was: "Does it scale?" So much of the day's charm had come from the gathering's modest size and intimate setting, which allowed for natural moments of connection.

The afternoon programming included a "visioning" session with Burning Man's associate director of engagement and roundtables that grappled with topics like "the pros and cons of community engagement." Sauer-Klein, for her part, knew the attendees would be watching her tactics closely. "I see what you did there," people said to her throughout the day, noticing things like the emphasis on keeping things analog to make the day feel more special.

In one session, Sauer-Klein pulled back the curtain on the strategy she used to organize the day. Her guiding principle was what she called the "dramatic arc model."

Like any good story, the day was designed with rising action that culminated in a peak, followed by a gradual denouement, with participants ideally changed by the experience. That pattern distinguished the conference from the more common "flat line model," as she called it, which moves from keynote to panel to lunch to fireside chat to happy hour. Sauer-Klein argued that even small changes that build in opportunities for connection and reflection between sessions can completely change the feel of a more traditionally formulated event. At the "Golden Hour" closing, guests were directed outdoors toward a table full of gold glittery top hats, bowties and beaded necklaces. A chocolate fountain bubbled and plastic Prosecco flutes lent an air of casual refinement to the scene. Unforced and unhurried, we enjoyed quiet conversations over the music, which was provided at a respectful volume by a local band playing on the lawn. It was strikingly different from the typical conference reception outside a hotel ballroom or in a cavernous convention hall filled with lanyards and blazers and business cards, where you need to shout to be heard over the din. "Does it scale?" I asked Sauer-Klein, who was sporting gold sunglasses. "I do believe it's possible," she said.

Aziz Ansari's Film-Directing Debut, 'Good Fortune,' Is A Barrel Of Hollow Laughs

By SONIA RAO

Arj is a documentary film editor who just can't catch a break. Struggling to keep up with Los Angeles rent while between gigs, he lives out of his car and works temporary jobs on Taskrabbit-like apps. When a client's child asks if he ever aspired to do more than someone else's laundry, Arj snaps. He tells the kid that HIS dreams of becoming an archaeologist are futile because life is unfair and "the American Dream is dead." The client leaves Arj a bad review.

Written by and starring comedian Aziz Ansari, "Good Fortune" is also his debut as a film director. The fantasy comedy cleverly diagnoses some of society's greatest faults, juxtaposing the ludicrous priorities of the 1 percent with the also-ridiculous hoops everyone else must jump through to make ends meet. All the world is a farce, Ansari seems to say, while suggesting that it can still be saved. But like a breezy sitcom episode, his big-screen creation doesn't feel the need to offer solutions.

"Good Fortune" begins with Keanu Reeves standing atop the Griffith Observatory, gazing out over the Angelenos he will rescue from themselves. In a clear homage to Wim Wenders's "Wings of Desire," Reeves sports a pair of white feathered wings, playing an actual angel named Gabriel who nudges texting-and-driving humans into paying attention to the road. Gabriel is shocked to encounter Arj texting with a friend, declaring that he has nothing to live for. The angel decides to overstep the responsibilities bestowed upon him by his divine boss (an underutilized Sandra Oh) and takes it upon himself to help Arj appreciate his life.

Seth Rogen factors in as a venture capitalist named Jeff, who hires Arj as a personal assistant – then fires him a week in when Arj uses his company card to court a new love interest, Elena (Keke Palmer). Gabriel makes Jeff and Arj swap circumstances a la "Trading Places," with Arj waking up in a glass-walled mansion and Jeff relocating to a car. The angel, a bit dense, is somehow surprised when Arj doesn't want to switch back.

Ansari, who dipped into more serious waters on his Netflix series "Master of None" after a hilarious run as small-town entrepreneur Tom Haverford in the sitcom "Parks and Recreation," said at a public appearance last year that the massive box-office success of Greta Gerwig's "Barbie" renewed his faith in the viability of theatrical comedies. "Good Fortune" appeals to the masses with its A-list cast and light situational humor but throws a few sharp darts: A quip about Jeff learning empathy from a Jay Shetty book, for instance, got a chuckle out of this critic, who has spent far too much time trying to understand celebrities' obsession with the smooth-talking self-help guru.

The film takes advantage of its assembled array of comedic minds. Reeves is endearing as a foolish angel, his deadpan delivery underscoring Gabriel's utter cluelessness. The scenes he shares with Rogen are charming enough for executives to green-light a buddy comedy starring the unlikely duo. Palmer, forced to play the straight woman as a hardware store employee trying to unionize her workplace, manages to infuse her trademark playfulness into Elena's flirtations with Arj.



Aziz Ansari and Keke Palmer play love interests Arj and Elena in "Good Fortune."

These actors' natural talents might compensate for Ansari's shortcomings as a director. While each of them turns in a capable performance, he struggles to combine their individual storylines into a cohesive film. Their screen time is miscalibrated, favoring Arj's light banter with Gabriel and Jeff over more consequential conversations with Elena about shared struggles. And although there are a few interesting visual choices at play, such as when cinematographer Adam Newport-Berra casts green light on an envious Arj during a party at Jeff's house, Ansari put out more cinematic work on a streaming service when he directed the carefully framed third season of "Master of None."

"Good Fortune" marks Ansari's on-screen return to narrative work after a series of setbacks. In 2022, with the gray area of his babe.net dating scandal behind him, he began shooting a film adaptation of Atul Gawande's "Being Mortal" that halted production when star Bill

Murray was accused of inappropriate behavior. Ansari then pivoted to "Good Fortune," bringing along "Being Mortal" co-stars Palmer and Rogen. Just last week, Ansari made headlines when newly reinstated talk show host Jimmy Kimmel asked why he chose to perform at the Saudi government's Riyadh Comedy Festival with the likes of Dave Chappelle and Bill Burr, which advocacy organizations and other stand-ups have criticized as condoning the regime's record of abusing human rights.

"There's people over there that don't agree with the stuff the government's doing," Ansari said. "To ascribe the worst behavior of the government onto those people, that's not fair. Just like there's people in America that don't agree with the things the government is doing."

Of course, the Saudi government cut Ansari a check, not the people – a fact that clashes with the "money isn't everything" messaging behind "Good Fortune." Even if one were to separate the artist from his art, the naiveté

coloring Ansari's response to Kimmel – donating part of his fee doesn't mitigate his decision to perform – manifests in the film as well. One venture capitalist realizing he underpays his workers does not have much of a ripple effect, though the scene operates as though it does. And after all that, viewers still don't know whether Arj will be able to make his rent.

In fact, nearly all the problems identified at the start of "Good Fortune" remain by its end. While well-intentioned, this is a movie about class consciousness that lacks in self-awareness. Its plentiful laughs ring hollow.

Two stars. Rated R. At theaters. Contains language and some drug use. 98 minutes.

Rating guide: Four stars masterpiece, three stars very good, two stars okay, one star poor, no stars waste of time.

-THE WASHINGTON POST



From left, Keanu Reeves plays a guardian angel who swaps the life circumstances of characters played by Seth Rogen and Aziz Ansari.

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05/23/25- 05/15/26 - SL

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04/18/25 - 04/17/26 -SL

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10/17-11/14-SD

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10/10-10/31-JG

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10/10-10/31 SL

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10/17-11/14 SL

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09/26/2026 - 09/18/2026-SL

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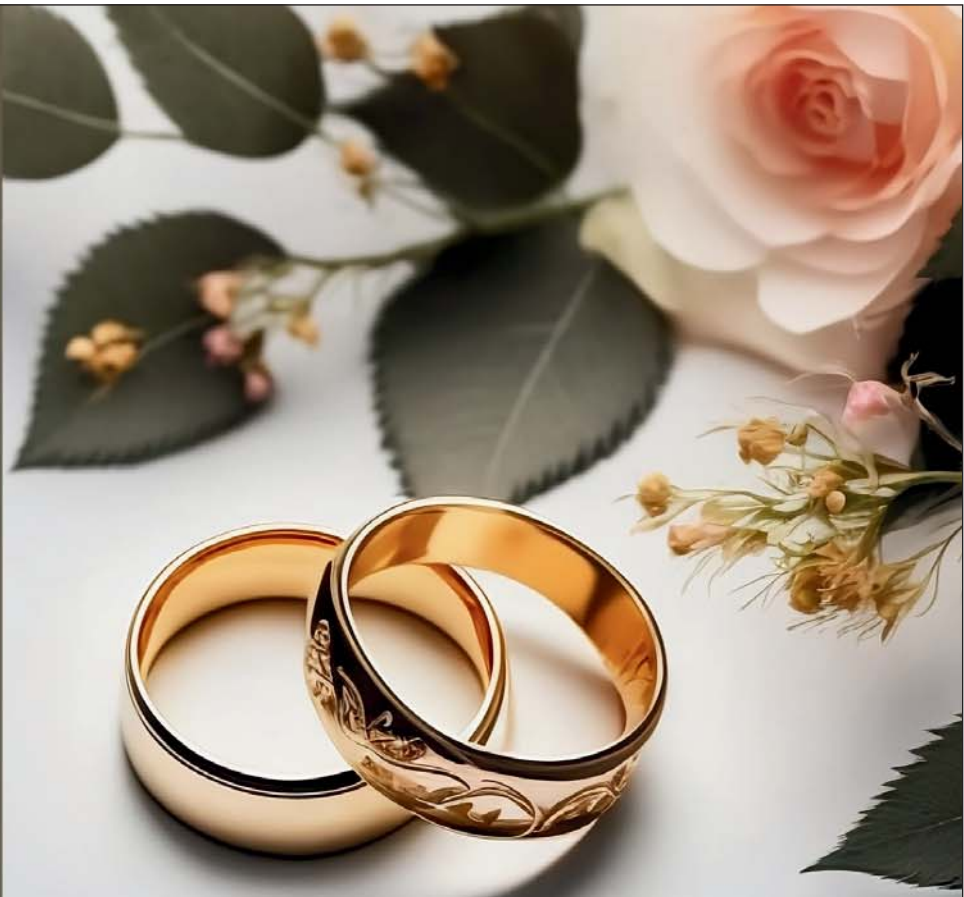
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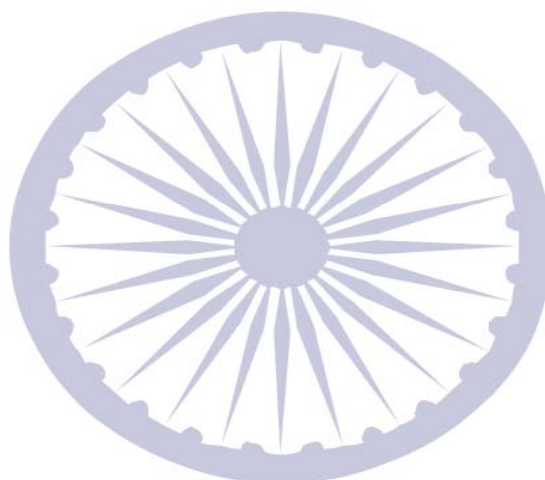
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