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A Global Icon Retires From NASA

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DESI TALK

IN CHICAGO



77th Republic Day celebrated in India and US

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“Mother of a deal”: India and European Union sign landmark trade agreement

PHOTOS: MISCELLANEOUS

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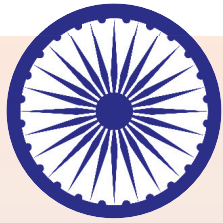
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President Droupadi Murmu's Address To The Nation On Eve Of India's 77th Republic Day Of India

BY PRESIDENT DROUPADI MURMU

Extracts from the January 25, 2026, speech by President of India Droupadi Murmu, celebrating the nation's 77th Republic Day

My dear fellow citizens,
Namaskar!
We, the people of India, at home and overseas, are going to celebrate Republic Day with fervour. I extend my heartfelt greetings to all of you on this National Festival. ...

Since 26th January, 1950, we have been propelling our Republic towards our constitutional ideals. On that day, our Constitution was fully enforced.

Our Constitution is the foundational document of the largest republic in world history. The ideals of justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity enshrined in our Constitution define our Republic.

Lauh Purush, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, unified our nation. Last year, on 31st October, a grateful nation enthusiastically celebrated his 150th birth anniversary.

Since 7th November last year, celebrations marking 150 years of the composition of our national song 'Vande Mataram' are also being organised. This song which is a prayer to the divine form of Bharat Mata, instils patriotism in every Indian. The great nationalist poet Subramanya Bharati composed the song "Vande Mataram Yenbom", in the Tamil language, meaning "Let us chant Vande Mataram", and connected the masses on an even larger scale with the spirit of Vande Mataram. Translations of this song in other Indian languages also became popular. Sri Aurobindo translated this song into English. 'Vande Mataram', composed by the venerable Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay is our lyrical national prayer.

Two days ago, on 23rd January, the nation paid its respectful tributes to Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose on his birth anniversary. Since 2021, Netaji's Jayanti is celebrated as 'Parakram Diwas' so that the people, especially the youth, can draw inspiration from his indomitable patriotism. Netaji's slogan 'Jai Hind' is the declaration of our national pride.

Dear fellow citizens,

All of you are strengthening our vibrant republic.

The valiant soldiers of our three armed forces are always vigilant in the defence of our motherland. Our dedicated personnel in the police and in the Central Armed Police Forces are continuously and diligently working for the internal security of the people.

Our farmers toil hard to produce food for the people.

The path-breaking and talented women of our country are setting new benchmarks in many fields.

Our accomplished doctors, nurses, and all healthcare workers are dedicated to taking care of the health of the people.

Our committed sanitation workers play a major role in maintaining cleanliness in our country.

Our enlightened teachers are shaping future generations. Our world-class scientists and engineers are giving new direction to the country's development.

Our industrious workers are rebuilding the nation.

With their talent and contributions, our promising youth and children strengthen our faith in the great future of our country.

Our talented artists, crafts-persons and writers are giving modern expression to our rich traditions.

Experts from various fields are guiding the multi-faceted development of the country.

Our energetic entrepreneurs are contributing immensely towards making the country developed and self-reliant.

Individuals and institutions serving society selflessly are illuminating the lives of countless people with their



PHOTO: PRESIDENTOFINDIA.GOV.IN

President Droupadi Murmu delivering speech to the nation on eve of India's 77th Republic Day of India.

work.

All the people working in the government and the non-government sectors, discharging their duties sincerely and efficiently are contributing to nation-building.

Peoples' representatives, committed to public service, are helping achieve welfare and development goals in line with popular aspirations.

Thus, all enlightened and sensitive citizens are advancing the progress of our Republic.

Dear fellow citizens,

Today, the 25th of January, is celebrated as 'National Voters' Day' in our country. Our adult citizens enthusiastically cast their votes to elect their representatives. Babasaheb Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar believed that the exercise of the right to vote leads to political education.

The active and empowered participation of women is extremely important for the development of the country.

Our women are breaking traditional stereotypes and forging ahead. They are actively contributing to the overall development of the country. More than ten crore women associated with self-help groups are redefining the process of development. Women are making their mark in every field, from agriculture to space, from self-employment to the armed forces. In the field of sports, our daughters have set new benchmarks globally. Last year in November, the daughters of India scripted a golden chapter in sporting history by winning the ICC Women's Cricket World Cup and subsequently the Blind Women's T20 World Cup. Last year, the final match of the Chess World Cup was played between two Indian women.

The number of women representatives in Panchayati Raj institutions is nearly 46 percent.

The role of Nari Shakti will be crucial in the making of Viksit Bharat. ...

.... Last year on 15th November, the people of our country celebrated the fifth Janjatiya Gaurav Divas on the birth anniversary of Dharti Aaba Bhagwan Birsa Munda, and that marked the culmination of the celebrations held to commemorate the 150th Jayanti of Bhagwan Birsa Munda. Through the 'Adi Karmayogi' campaign, the leadership potential of the people of the tribal community has been nurtured....

Our Annadata farmers are the backbone of our society and economy. Generations of hardworking farmers have made our country self-reliant in food grains. It is due to the hard work of our farmers that we are able to export agricultural products.

Millions of our people who have been struggling with poverty for decades have been lifted above the poverty line. The world's largest scheme of its kind embody-

ing the spirit of Antyodaya, the 'PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana', is based on the idea that no one should go hungry in our country of over 140 crore people. This scheme is providing succour to nearly 81 crore beneficiaries.

Our country has the world's largest young population. What gives us special pride is that our youth possess immense talent. Our young entrepreneurs, sports-persons, scientists, and professionals are infusing new energy into the country and making their mark on the global stage.

The impressive success demonstrated by start-ups in our country is mainly driven by our young entrepreneurs. I am confident that the power of youth will play a leading role in the making of Viksit Bharat by 2047.

Dear fellow citizens,

India is the world's fastest-growing major economy. Despite global uncertainties, India is recording continuous economic growth. We are moving towards achieving our goal of becoming the world's third-largest economy in the near future.

By investing in the creation of world-class infrastructure, we are rebuilding our economic strength at a much larger scale. In this journey of shaping our economic destiny, Atma-nirbharata and Swadeshi are our guiding principles.

Dear fellow citizens,

Since ancient times, humanity has benefited from our civilization, culture, and spiritual traditions. Ayurveda, Yoga, and Pranayama have been appreciated and adopted by the global community. Sree Narayana Guru, the great poet, social reformer and spiritual icon born in Kerala had said that an ideal place is one where all people live with the spirit of fraternity, free from discrimination based on caste and creed. I will try to express this thought of Sree Narayana Guru in his own words:

Jati-bhedam mat-dvesham edum-illade sarvarum

Sodara-tvena vaadunna matruka-sthana manita.

The Constitution of India is now available in all the Indian languages included in the Eighth Schedule. Reading and understanding the Constitution in Indian languages will spread constitutional nationalism among the people and strengthen their sense of pride.

The gap between the government and the general public is being continuously reduced. Emphasis is being placed on good governance based on mutual trust. ...

'Ease of Living' is being emphasised with the goal of improving everyday life.

.... Building Viksit Bharat is the shared responsibility of all citizens.

.... For example, our people have adopted the digital payment system on a massive scale. Today, more than half of the world's digital transactions take place in India. From buying goods at the smallest shop to paying for an auto-rickshaw ride, the use of digital payments has become an impressive example for the global community.

Dear fellow citizens,

Last year, our country launched precision strikes against terror infrastructure through Operation Sindoor. Terror centres were destroyed, and many terrorists met their end. Our self-reliance in the field of defence powered the historic success of Operation Sindoor.

At the Siachen Base Camp, I saw our brave soldiers fully prepared and motivated to defend the country even amidst extremely challenging conditions. I also had the opportunity to fly in the Sukhoi and Rafale fighter planes of the Indian Air Force. I saw the combat readiness of the Air Force. I witnessed the extraordinary capabilities of the Indian Navy's indigenously built aircraft carrier, INS Vikrant. I also sortied in the submarine INS Vaghsheer. Based on the strength of the Army, Air Force, and Navy, people have complete trust in our defence-preparedness.

Joy of Sharing

PROJECT 'LIFE' : FROM A MODEST BEGINNING TO A GLOBAL HUMANITARIAN MOVEMENT



Padma Shri Dr. Sudhir Parikh, Chairman, Life Global, NJ, USA

The Koticha brothers' early vision of taking Project 'Life' beyond borders has today become a reality. Under Ms. Koticha Shah's guidance, Life Global partner charities have been established in the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia, enabling the global Indian diaspora to actively participate in nation-building and humanitarian service.



What began in 1978 with a humble contribution of just ₹101 has today evolved into one of India's most respected and far-reaching humanitarian institutions. Founded by brothers Shashikant and Chandrakant Koticha, Project 'Life' stands as a powerful testament to how vision, integrity, and sustained commitment can transform societies locally and globally.

Headquartered in Rajkot, Gujarat, Project 'Life' was born from a simple yet profound belief "Giving back to society is a moral responsibility". Nearly 48 years later, the organization's footprint spans 8 critical domains, including Healthcare, Education, Environment, Women Empowerment, Thalassemia Prevention, Health & Wellness & Health Sciences. Through these interventions, Project 'Life' has positively impacted millions of lives across India and beyond.

At the helm of Project 'Life' is Ms. Meetal Koticha Shah, Joint Executive Trustee and CEO, who represents the next generation of leadership rooted in values and vision. Carrying forward the legacy of her father, Shri Chandrakant Koticha, who nurtured the organization for over 4 decades, Ms. Shah has devoted more than 20 years to expanding and strengthening its impact. Under her stewardship, Project 'Life' has earned numerous national and international accolades, reinforcing its stature as a pillar of ethical and effective social service.

Blood Banking

Environment Protection

Health & Wellness

Women Empowerment

Thalassaemia Prevention

Primary Education (Rural)

From ₹101 to a Global Movement, Project 'Life' continues to prove that when compassion meets commitment, the impact is timeless and borderless.

NRG Integration

Paramedical Education

BLOOD 1981

Project 'Life' first gained prominence through its pioneering work in blood donation. In 1981, when the Saurashtra and Kuchchh regions had no functional blood banks, the organization established the Life Blood Centre (LBC) - the first of its kind in the region. Since then, LBC has provided over **754,515** units of safe & quality blood and blood components, primarily serving poor and needy patients. In recognition of this pioneering work, the Life Blood Centre received the prestigious ISBT Award for Developing Countries in 2020 - the first standalone blood bank in India to do so.

ENVIRONMENT 1990

Project 'Life' extends its compassion to the environment as well. Since inception of Life Greenfield Centre, it has distributed **279,300+** fully grown trees, each nurtured for 4 to 5 years to heights of 6 to 15 feet, contributing meaningfully to reforestation and ecological preservation. Survival ratio of these plants will be 99.9%.

THALASSAEMIA 1991

A significant portion of this blood supply supports children suffering from Thalassemia major, a hereditary blood disorder prevalent in Gujarat and several parts of India. Project 'Life' has conducted Thalassemia screening for **722,285** youth across colleges, universities, and communities, while sensitizing over **1.5 million** people through awareness campaigns.

EDUCATION 2000

Following the devastating Gujarat earthquake, Project 'Life' identified a critical yet often overlooked need: rebuilding safe and sustainable school infrastructure. This led to the launch of the Primary School Infrastructure Development Program (PSIDP), aimed at rejuvenating government primary schools in rural Gujarat. The organization adopts entire villages-not just schools to ensure holistic development.

To date, Project 'Life' has built **118** Government primary schools in rural Saurashtra in which nearly **35,000** students are studying and awarded **30,579** scholarships to meritorious students pursuing higher education.

HEALTH & WELLNESS 2003

Project 'Life' actively promotes the importance of yoga as a way of life, recognizing its significant role in enhancing physical health, mental well-being, and spiritual balance. Through its regular 20 sessions of 10 Yoga Units, Shibir and Universal Healing Programs, more than **942,900** individuals have benefitted, promoting healthier lifestyles and a deeper connection.

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT 2008

Project 'Life' has been deeply committed to Women Empowerment, particularly widows and women living below the poverty line. Through structured skill-training programs, over **13,000** women have been enabled to start micro-enterprises or secure employment, fostering financial independence and social dignity benefitting nearly **52,000** people.

NRG CENTRE 2011

The organization also operates the Non-Resident Gujarati (NRG) Centre for Saurashtra & Kuchchh identified by Government of Gujarat strengthening emotional and developmental ties between NRIs and their homeland.

HEALTH SCIENCE 2022

Life Institute of Health Science (LIHS) is a premier institute dedicated to professional education in Medical Laboratory Sciences. Affiliated to Saurashtra University, Rajkot, LIHS offers structured, practice-oriented programs designed to meet national and international laboratory workforce requirements

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Glimpses From India's 77th Republic Day Parade



In his typical fashion, India's tech-savvy Prime Minister Narendra Modi reflected on the grand parade of January 26, 2026, the 77th Republic Day of India, on X, befitting a modern, leader with a penchant for talking frequently to his citizens through social media - "India celebrated Republic Day with great enthusiasm and pride. The magnificent parade at Kartavya Path showcased the strength of our democracy, the richness of our heritage and the unity that binds our nation together," PM Modi said.



Seen on these pages are scenes from the Parade from Government of India sources as well as social media, showing examples of India's armed forces, their heavy duty armor on land and in the air, as well as the special guests invited to the Parade as is the tradition. This year the special guests were President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyden, and European Council President Antonio Costa.



GUJARATI / INDIAN PHYSICIANS CONVENTION 2026

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- Workshops**
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- Gala Luncheons & Dinners**
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- Women's Forum**
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By registering for this convention, you accept these terms and conditions:

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- Link with the code for discounted hotel room will be provided upon registration
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- The convention team advises to follow the national COVID 19 guidelines.

This Ad is Sponsored By Dr. Sudhir Parikh

Gujarati/Indian Physicians Convention 2026

Press Release

Gujarati/Indian Physicians Convention 2026. August 19-23, 2026 | Hilton Orlando, Florida Overview

The Gujarati/Indian Physicians Convention (GPC) 2026 is a premier gathering of physicians of Gujarati and Indian origin from across the United States and around the world. What began as a small professional meeting has evolved into a landmark international convention that promotes professional excellence, cultural unity, and lifelong connections.

The convention was originally launched as a modest gathering of physicians from a few medical colleges in Gujarat—including Baroda Medical College (BMC) and B.J. Medical College Ahmedabad (BJMC)—held in Ohio. Building on its early success, the convention expanded to Orlando, Florida, welcoming participants from many more medical colleges across Gujarat.

Subsequent conventions in Atlantic City, New Jersey, brought together alumni from all medical colleges of Gujarat and Mumbai, while the meeting in Atlanta, Georgia, marked a major milestone as the convention became truly international, welcoming physicians from across USA, India and beyond.

Now, in 2026, the convention returns to Orlando, Florida, with a broader and more inclusive vision—inviting not only Gujarati physicians but all Indian physi-

cians to come together in a spirit of unity, collaboration, and celebration.

Why Attend Gujarati/ Indian Physicians Convention 2026

The 2026 convention offers a unique opportunity to reconnect with former classmates, expand professional networks, participate in thought-provoking discussions, and earn Continuing Medical Education (CME) credits—all while celebrating Gujarati and Indian heritage, cuisine, and culture.

Convention Highlights

- Keynote Speakers**
Inspirational addresses from distinguished Gujarati/Indian and industry leaders
- Panel Discussions**
In-depth conversations on current trends and emerging topics in medicine
- Workshops**
Interactive sessions focused on skill enhancement and professional growth
- Networking Opportunities**
Dedicated sessions to reconnect with colleagues and build new relationships
- Gala Luncheons & Dinners**
Elegant dining experiences featuring top-class entertainment and celebration
- Women's Forum**
Discussions led by prominent women leaders on medical and non-medical issues
- CEO Forum**
Insights from entrepreneurial Gujarati/Indian leaders and CEOs
- Poster Presentations**

Research presentations by medical students, residents, and fellows

- Special & Social Events**
Programs designed for social interaction and networking
- Culture & Community**
The Gujarati/Indian Physicians

Convention brings together physicians under one umbrella to celebrate shared culture, heritage, and values. Attendees will enjoy authentic, delicious, mouthwatering Gujarati and Indian cuisine, while strengthening both professional and personal bonds.

The convention also serves as a unique platform for alumni chapters to officially hold their general body meetings and conduct the business of their respective alma maters. In addition, it provides an ideal opportunity for classmates to organize reunions, reconnect meaningfully, and earn CME credits while fully participating in the convention experience.

Volunteer Opportunities

The organizing committee welcomes volunteers with diverse skills and availability. Whether contributing a few hours or serving in a leadership role, volunteer participation is highly valued.

- Participation is voluntary and invitational
- Paid convention registration is required for all volunteers
- Volunteers are responsible for their own travel and accommodations, if applicable
- No financial compensation is provided

- Volunteer certificates may be issued to eligible young volunteers
- Authorized expenses will be reimbursed upon submission of valid receipts

To volunteer, please email your interest to:

gujaraticonvention@gmail.com
Registration Information

Interest in GPC 2026 has been overwhelming, with over 500 registrations received within the first week of the announcement. The convention is expected to sell out.

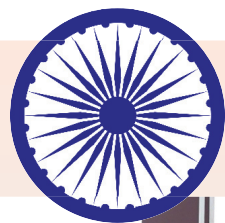
- Early-Bird Registration: \$399
- Available to the first 1,500 registrants only
- Registration rates will increase once the early-bird limit is reached

A discounted, negotiated hotel reservation link will be emailed upon completion of convention registration. Hotel reservations without confirmed convention registration will not be honored.

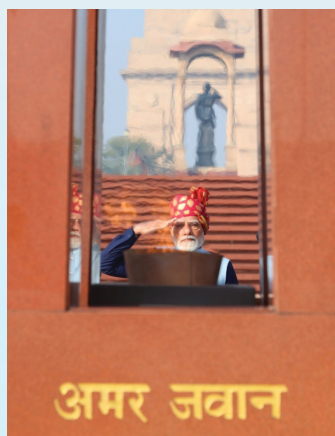
Important Dates

- Convention Dates: August 19-23, 2026
- Location: Hilton Orlando, 6001 Destination Pkwy, Orlando, FL
- Media & Press Contact
Gujarati/Indian Physicians Convention Team 2026

For media inquiries, interviews, or additional information, please contact the organizing committee at gujaraticonvention@gmail.com.



Glimpses From India's 77th Republic Day Parade





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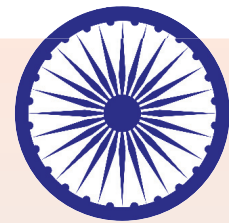
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India @United Nations: Celebrating Spirit Of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' On World Stage

By ARCHANA ADALJA

For all Indians in any part of the world, Republic Day celebrations honor India's Constitution and democratic values. They also honor its motto of Satyamev Jayate (Truth Triumphs), and its guiding principle of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (The Whole World is One Big Family).

INDIA AND THE UNITED NATIONS – India's principle of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, is at the heart of its involvement with the United Nations (UN) that started even before it became an independent nation.

When the UN was established 80 years ago, India became a founding member even though it was still a colony of Britain because of the promise it held for the world emerging from the devastation of World War II and the hopes for the future.

Although it became free only in 1947, India signed the Declaration by UN at Washington, D.C., on January 1, 1942. Afterwards, India signed the UN Charter at the UN Conference on International Organization in San Francisco on June 26, 1945.

India's strong belief and adherence to its guiding principle has been evident most prominently at the UN, in its actions for the international community. Rooted in the principle of treating the whole world as family is also India's commitment to multilateralism and dialogue as key to achieving shared goals and addressing common challenges faced by the global community.

To make this a reality, India has made the biggest contribution to the peacekeeping operations, created a unique development fund with the UN, emerged as the voice of the Global South and a promoter of gender equality.

WOMEN AT THE UN – One of India's most remarkable contributions to its UN family has been in regard to women, be it as the first President of the UN General Assembly or as the upholder of Human Rights and gender equality, or as peacekeepers working in the midst of war and strife, protecting and building lives.

Women Diplomats – Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit was the first woman to be elected President of the United Nations General Assembly in 1953, breaking a glass ceiling even before that became a common theme.

Hansa Mehta, as the Indian delegate on the UN Human Rights Commission in 1947-48, was responsible for changing the language of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights from "all men are created equal" to "all human beings", highlighting the need for gender equality.

Lakshmi Menon, India's delegate to the Third Committee in 1948, argued forcefully in favor of nondiscrim-



PM addressing at 'Summit of the Future' at the United Nations General Assembly in New York, USA on September 23, 2024.

PHOTO: PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE



Glimpses of 76th Republic Day Parade at Kartavya Path, in New Delhi on January 26, 2025.

PHOTO: COURTESY GOVERNMENT OF INDIA PHOTO LICENSED UNDER THE GOVERNMENT OPEN DATA LICENSE.

ination based on sex and "the equal rights of men and women" in the in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

WOMEN PEACEKEEPERS – India has long been a strong advocate for the meaningful participation of women in UN peacekeeping. India has deployed women in both military and police capacities since 1960s, with first deployment of Indian women medical officers to the Congo.

India's External Affairs Ministry (EAM) numbers India's deployment of women peacekeepers to over 150,

serving across six critical missions, including those in the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Lebanon, Golan Heights, Western Sahara, and Abyei.

In 2007 India deployed the first-ever all-female Formed Police Unit to Liberia, empowering Liberian women to become more actively involved in their nation's security sectors, resulting in increased female participation over time.

In 2023, Major Radhika Sen was honored as the "Military Gender Advocate of the Year 2023" by UN Headquarters, acknowledging the significant impacts Indian women have made in UN peacekeeping efforts.

Advocating for developing countries – Since its inception, India has played a major role in the UN struggle against colonialism and apartheid, becoming a founding member of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Group of 77. It was India who raised the issue of racial discrimination in South Africa at the UN in 1946. India was one of the first signatories on the Convention on Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination.

India thus became a strong advocate for the developing countries and their concerns, articulating the economic concerns of developing countries in UN-sponsored conferences including the triennial UN Conference on Trade and Development and the 1992 Conference on the Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro.

As a leading member of the G-77, G-15, G20 and BRICS groups of nations, India has articulated the voice of the Global South at the UN.

Issues of environmentally sustainable development and the promotion and protection of human rights have been important focus of India's foreign policy in UN's international forums.

INDIA-UN DEVELOPMENT FUND – In its commitment to global development, India has set up the \$150 million India-UN Development Fund to help other developing countries.

In a unique feature, this fund, unlike the other so-called development agencies of other countries, lets the recipient nations decide what they want, instead of telling them what to do.

The Fund focuses on least developed countries and small island developing nations. But others, especially those from the Commonwealth, are also among the more than 20 countries that have benefited from it.

The projects funded through this unique UN partnership range from health, alternative energy and climate resilience to technology, business development and education.

India also shares its expertise in development, tech

-CONTINUED ON PAGE 20



Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit (left) at the UN in 1953.



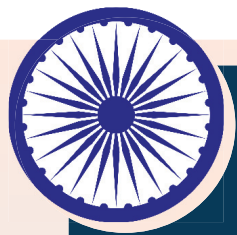
Left to Right: Angela Jurdak (Lebanon), Fryderyka Kalinowski (Poland), Bodgil Begtrup (Denmark), Minerva Bernardino (Dominican Republic), and Hansa Mehta (India), delegates to the Sub-commission on the Status of Women, New York, May 1946.

ગુજરાત ટાઈમ્સ
Gujarat Times



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"On behalf of the people of the United States, I extend my heartfelt congratulations to the government and people of India as you celebrate your 77th Republic Day. The United States and India share a historic bond as the world's oldest and largest democracies."

President Donald J. Trump



PHOTO: RELEASED BY US EMBASSY

Statement Of US Secretary Of State Marco Rubio: January 25, 2026

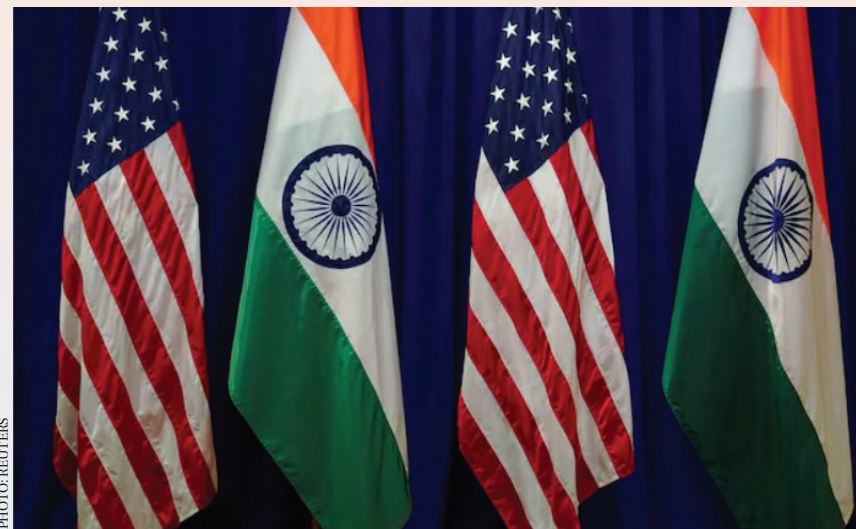


PHOTO: REUTERS

On behalf of the people of the United States, I extend my heartfelt congratulations to the people of India on your Republic Day.

The United States and India share a historic bond. From our close cooperation on defense, energy, critical minerals, and emerging technologies

to our multi-layered engagement through the Quad, the U.S.-India relationship delivers real results for our two countries and for the Indo-Pacific region.

I look forward to working together to advance our shared objectives in the year ahead.

India @United Nations: Celebrating Spirit Of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' On World Stage

-CONTINUED FROM PAGE 18

nology, health and education through the Fund and other UN agencies.

CONTRIBUTION TO UN PEACEKEEPING – India's participation in UN peacekeeping dates back to 1953, with the UN operation in Korea. Since then, India has played a significant role in UN Peacekeeping, contributing over 290,000 peacekeepers across more than 50 UN missions. Currently, over 5,000 Indian peacekeepers are actively deployed in nine missions, placing it among the top troop-contributing countries, according to the EAM.

India has also empowered other Global South nations to enhance their peacekeeping capabilities. Through its Centre for UN Peacekeeping, India offers training and capacity-building programs, including specialized courses for women peacekeepers, and initiatives carried out for ASEAN nations in 2023.

Security Council Permanent Membership – All this, yet India has not been able to acquire a seat as a permanent member of the UN Security Council. This is not least because of the machinations of Beijing and Islamabad using the issue of the state of Jammu & Kashmir which Pakistan unlawfully occupies notwithstanding UN's 1946 resolution requiring it to withdraw troops and not fund terrorism. That is a subject for another detailed examination.

As per the UN Charter, the Security Council was envisaged as the apex body meant to safeguard international peace and security. The five permanent members, China, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, and the United States each hold the veto power, alongside ten non-permanent members elected for two year terms.

In January 2021, India became a non-permanent



PHOTO: COURTESY INDIA'S EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

A group of Indian Women Peacekeepers.

member of the UN Security Council for the 8th time. It has been seeking a permanent seat on the UN Security Council as a member of the G4, an organization composed of Brazil, Germany, Japan and India, all of whom are currently seeking permanent seats.

On its part, India thinks it qualifies for the permanent seat as the world's largest liberal democracy. It is also the world's fifth largest economy and third largest in terms of purchasing power parity. India is the largest contributor of troops to the UN peacekeeping missions.

India has been seeking permanent membership for too long, and its concern was voiced very aptly by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the UN General Assembly on September 26, 2020.

"... For how long will India be kept out of the decision-making structures of the United Nations? Reform



PHOTO: COURTESY GOVERNMENT OF INDIA PHOTO LICENSED UNDER THE GOVERNMENT OPEN DATA LICENSE

Cultural Dance at the Republic Day Parade 2025.

in the responses, in the processes, and in the very character of the UN is the need of the hour..." Modi had said.

With a conservative perspective, India has always accepted the UN as a governing body which would do good for every member in the world. It is time now for the UN to also accept it as family in the same spirit, it feels.

Regardless of permanent membership, the democratic republic of India will continue to abide by the UN Charter and further its goals, as stated by India's External Affairs Minister, Dr. S. Jaishankar. "...Guided by the philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, the belief that the world is one family, India will continue to contribute meaningfully to the cause of UN peacekeeping."

ASTROLOGY



This week for you

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

ARIES: Managing interactions with someone you dislike may feel draining, but restraint will protect your image. A competitive situation at work works in your favour. Academic progress improves steadily. Socially, you may find yourself drawing attention effortlessly. Trust your judgment, as choices made now prove beneficial later. Staying composed and practical helps you maintain balance and emerge stronger.

TAURUS: Health requires attention, as neglect could slow your routine temporarily. Professional skills attract reliable clients. Emotional comfort grows through meaningful conversations with someone you trust. Romantic moments feel rewarding. Financial discipline becomes essential, so prioritise necessities over indulgence. This balanced approach helps you enjoy personal connections while staying secure and prepared for future responsibilities.

GEMINI: Packed schedules leave little room for personal errands this week. Creative professionals may feel mentally blocked, but external inspiration brings fresh ideas. Planning a celebration or social event occupies much of your attention. Love life feels joyful, offering welcome relief. Travel opportunities excite those craving new experiences. Managing time ensures productivity while allowing space for moments that uplift your mood.

CANCER: Consistency remains essential for success in studies. Unnecessary suspicion about others' intentions only creates mental unrest. Maintaining harmony with seniors at work proves wiser than pushing disagreements. Expressing emotions openly helps people understand your perspective better. Honest communication clears confusion and strengthens bonds. Staying calm allows you to move ahead without emotional strain affecting your progress.

LEO: An unexpected connection may quickly turn into a friendly bond. Handling a family issue with brings favourable outcomes. Financial prospects improve through a joint initiative. Staying physically active supports wellbeing. Your partner remains supportive, respecting your ambitions. This encouragement allows you to pursue goals freely while maintaining emotional stability and healthy relationships.

VIRGO: Being overly critical at work may lower morale. Emotional healing becomes necessary to avoid mental strain in a relationship. Choosing reconciliation over conflict brings peace. Commitments made earlier must be honoured, even if they demand extra effort or time adjustments. Handling responsibilities with sensitivity helps restore balance and prevents complications in both professional and personal spheres.

LIBRA: Family responsibilities require practical action. Work efforts may not yield immediate rewards. Travel plans receive positive support. Flexibility in relationships helps maintain harmony. Financial stability remains intact, offering reassurance. Staying realistic allows you to navigate results calmly while making the most of opportunities that bring mental relaxation and emotional clarity.

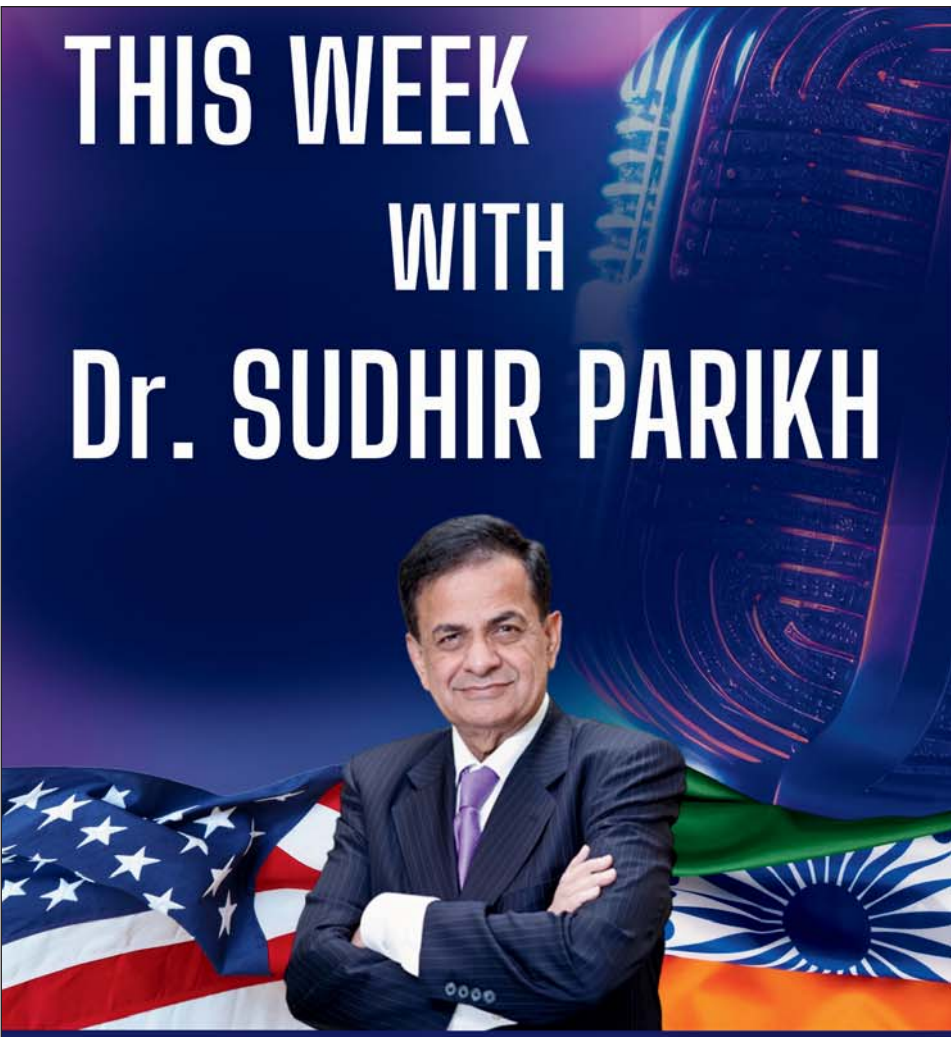
SCORPIO: Professional rivalry may tilt in your favour, but consistent effort is essential to maintain progress. Academic focus needs strengthening to avoid distractions. Financial strain could arise from supporting someone. Family matters demand thoughtful evaluation. Avoid risky investments, as speculation may lead to losses. Pay attention to health, particularly issues related to digestion or skin, to maintain overall balance this week.

SAGITTARIUS: Careless words or actions could influence someone negatively, so practise restraint. Helping a stranger selflessly may create a long-term connection. Group activities bring a sense of belonging. Doubts about someone's intentions fade as their sincerity becomes evident. This week encourages growth through positive interactions and mindful behaviour, helping you build trust while learning the importance of responsible influence on others.

CAPRICORN: Preparation for an upcoming official responsibility requires use of resources. Romantic partners and newlyweds enjoy quality time together, strengthening bonds. Transparency with elders proves helpful when guidance is needed. Seeking advice prevents complications. A balanced approach between duties and relationships allows you to handle obligations while maintaining support within your personal environment.

AQUARIUS: Long-term planning is essential before committing to costly purchases. Emotional sensitivity may surface due to a partner's behaviour, making communication necessary. Professional matters feel uncertain, prompting self-evaluation and reassessment of goals. Academic performance may lag. Regaining clarity through reflection helps restore direction and prevents decisions from affecting stability.

PISCES: Changes in the workplace bring new responsibilities and require assertiveness. Support from your partner strengthens confidence and decision-making. Business prospects show improvement. Academic motivation rises, pushing you to perform better. Property matters or vehicle registration may progress. Taking initiative and trusting abilities helps you adapt to transitions while securing growth.



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“Mother Of All Deals”: EU-India Trade Agreement

By ELLEN FRANCIS, KARISHMA MEHROTRA

In the latest display of major economies pursuing blockbuster free trade deals against the backdrop of President Donald Trump's tariff threats, the European Union and India announced a sweeping trade accord on Tuesday.

The agreement, driven by a search for new partnerships to shield their markets from a volatile America, will deepen ties between the 27-nation E.U. – a trading power that is traditionally Washington's closest partner – and India, among the world's fastest-growing major economies.

“We have concluded the mother of all deals,” European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said. “We have created a free-trade zone of 2 billion people, with both sides set to benefit. This is only the beginning.”

E.U. and Indian officials said they concluded nearly two decades of negotiations after von der Leyen, the head of the E.U.'s executive branch, and European Council President António Costa, who presides over meetings of the E.U.'s 27 heads of state and government, traveled to New Delhi on Monday. They joined Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi for a military parade on Republic Day, which celebrates the Indian constitution.

The agreement could double the total value of E.U. exports to India over the next six years, reducing Indian tariffs on European goods such as cars and pharmaceuticals, and European tariffs on Indian goods including chemicals and textiles, officials said. The agreement still requires broader legal and political approval in the E.U. and India.

As Trump upends U.S. alliances and global trade, Europe and India each found themselves staring down the barrel of the president's tariff threats over the past year.

For European leaders, the Trump administration's open disdain for the E.U. and looming shift from guaranteeing European security have spurred a push to “de-risk” from the United States – an approach the E.U. once reserved for its ties with China.

The giant deal trade deal between Europe and India reflects the ethos espoused by Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney in a widely circulated speech at the World Economic Forum in Davos last week. Carney said that America's smaller allies can no longer promote the pretense of a rules-based order to reap the benefits of being under the U.S. umbrella.

Carney, whose country has also been buffeted by U.S. tariffs and annexation threats, urged “middle powers” to chart their own course and come together where they have shared values or interests. Canada recently announced efforts to improve trade ties with China, only for Trump to react furiously and threaten 100 percent tariffs on Canadian goods if Ottawa pursues a free trade accord with Beijing. Carney said no such accord is envisioned.

Throughout Trump's tariff blitz, European leaders have sought to convey that they can help maintain open global markets, with or without an increasingly protectionist United States.

The bloc has raced to ink trade deals or intensify negotiations around the world, including with Indonesia and South America. America's rattled allies from Europe to Canada are closing ranks on trade, defense and other partnerships as Washington withdraws from coordination on climate, health and international aid.

After a whirlwind week of transatlantic tensions – in which Trump threatened and then suspended tariffs on European nations in his bid for Greenland – the E.U. has pushed for a win on the global stage, eyeing the long-elusive trade deal with India.

Europe is not alone in looking for new friends and hedging its bets. Indian and U.S. relations are at their lowest point in decades, strained by New Delhi's decision to publicly reject Trump's claim that he brokered a ceasefire between India and Pakistan in May.

India was among the first countries to begin negotiating a trade deal with the Trump administration after the



European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi arrive for a photo opportunity ahead of their meeting at the Hyderabad House in New Delhi, India, February 28, 2025.

president's slew of tariffs on dozens of nations last year, but the two sides have not been able to clinch an agreement.

Washington has slapped some of the steepest tariff rates against India, pushing India to thaw tensions with China and double down on vows of strategic autonomy. India has signed trade agreements in the past year with Britain, New Zealand and Oman.

Modi on Tuesday described the deal with the E.U. as the largest free trade agreement in India's history, which he said would help the country's farmers, small industries and services sector reach the European market.

The deal comes as India's economy continues to grow, but with sluggish manufacturing, weak consumption and inadequate job creation. For New Delhi, it represents a way to widen markets and attract investment in the hopes of reenergizing the domestic economy.

“This is not just a trade agreement,” Modi said. “This is a blueprint for a shared prosperity.”

E.U. officials said India, which has one of the most protected domestic car industries, would reduce or cut tariffs on more than 90 percent of European exported goods, and lower tariffs on up to 250,000 cars coming from the bloc.

European carmakers especially in Germany, hit by U.S. tariffs and tough Chinese competition, have welcomed the prospect of access to a new market. The deal also promises to boost trade in financial services, maritime transport and professional services.

While the two sides for years have laid the groundwork for expanding ties, some analysts said that the recent policies of the world's mightier powers created impetus for the agreement.

“This would not have happened without the massive geopolitical churn unleashed by the US, China, Russia – in a time of need, both sides have moved beyond mere commitments and have become friends in deed,” wrote Constantino Xavier, a senior fellow at the Center for Social and Economic Progress, a policy institute based in New Delhi.

One of the most difficult chasms between India and the E.U. has been India's long-standing ties with Russia. India has avoided condemning Russia's 2022 invasion of

Ukraine and its almost four-year war in the country.

“Europe has to grow out of the mindset that Europe's problems are the world's problems, but the world's problems are not Europe's problems,” Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said in Slovakia in June 2022, months after Russia invaded Ukraine.

The stance sits uneasily with European leaders who have become Kyiv's chief military backers and are in an intensifying confrontation with Russia. The E.U. has imposed many rounds of sanctions against the Kremlin including its oil and energy sector. In an attempt to hit Russian coffers harder, the bloc more recently has targeted entities in third countries, such as India and China, which have continued purchasing Russian oil throughout the war.

Recently, Trump slapped additional tariffs on India for its dependence on Russian crude oil, forcing the country to diversify. The country's legacy military equipment remains heavily Russian-made.

The E.U. previously was one of the more vocal critics of human rights concerns in India, but has quieted as Europe and India frame themselves as democratic leaders and seek to deepen a strategic partnership. Indian voices have increasingly criticized the E.U.'s much-touted promise of upholding democratic values as hypocritical.

Unlike India, the E.U. signed a trade deal with Trump last year. The hope for stability collapsed, however, when Trump threatened fresh tariffs this month on eight European nations that rebuffed his bid for the U.S. to control Greenland, an autonomous territory of NATO ally Denmark. Trump has since reversed course, but that has done little to assuage E.U. concerns about the risk of dependency.

E.U. leaders signed a free-trade deal with the South American trading bloc Mercosur this month. The European Parliament has since referred the Mercosur deal to the E.U. Court of Justice amid objections from farmers, which could stall its implementation for many months and undermine the E.U.'s claims of a geopolitical victory. E.U. leaders have suggested provisional implementation of the Mercosur trade deal could move ahead regardless.

-THE WASHINGTON POST

Krishnamoorthi Senate Campaigns Claims Victory In Democratic Primary Debate

By A Staff Writer

On January 26, 2026, Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi, D-Ill, engaged in the first Illinois U.S. Senate primary debate, which according to his campaign, he won hands down. The three candidates in the debate included Reps. Krishnamoorthi, and Robin Kelly, as well as Illinois Lt. Gov. Juliana Stratton. The event was hosted by WBEZ Chicago, a radio station, as well as the Chicago Sun-Times, University of Chicago's Institute of Politics and International House.

Over the course of the hour long debate, Krishnamoorthi's campaign says, his opponent "focused her time not on solutions but cheap political attacks," whereas, "Raja spoke directly to Illinois voters about his fight to rein in the Trump Administration, lower costs, and ensure that every Illinois family has the opportunity to thrive."

The debate was dominated by the subject of immigration enforcement, news reports said, as Stratton began by accusing Krishnamoorthi of having "voted to thank" the federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency, and "accepted funding from ICE contractors," wbez.org reported. The charges were strongly denied by the Indian American Congressman.

PHOTO: SCREENSHOT FROM VIDEO ON FACEBOOK @RAJAFORILL



Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi, D-Illinois, center, Lt. Gov. Juliana Stratton, left, and Rep. Robin Kelly right, at the Jan. 26, 2026, primary debate.

Krishnamoorthi's campaign said in its press release that he highlighted his plan to make life more affordable, including his bill to help Illinoisans buy their first home and his work to modernize America's skilled job training programs. He also spoke of his work to hold Trump accountable, including his calls to abolish Trump's ICE, unmask agents, and oppose DHS funding.

Krishnamoorthi claims Stratton's attacks were a result of being "25+ points behind in the polls" and not being able to raise campaign funds to raise her to second place in the polls.

Krishnamoorthi's campaign pointed to news reports about Stratton's record in the press release, quoting several news reports to do so.

Sikhs In Midwest Participate In MLK Day Celebration In Oakbrook, Illinois

By A Staff Writer

On January 19, 2026, the 3rd Annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Unity Breakfast was held at the Drury Lane Theater in Oakbrook Terrace, Illinois.

The participation of the Sikh community was coordinated by Roger Chawla, a member of this event organizing committee. A notable display in the lobby featured a poster with a photograph of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and wife Coretta Scott King meeting a Sikh civil rights activist Jaswant Singh Dhami in Southall London, U.K. in 1965. Dhami was the founder of the "Indian Workers Association" (IWA) Great Britain in 1958, to combat racial discrimination experienced by migrant workers of Indian and various other ethnicities in England.

Known as the DuPage County MLK Unity Breakfast, this event brought together a diverse array of community members, including political, business, and civic leaders, neighbors, and change-makers, all united by the common goal of fostering unity within DuPage County and beyond.

The breakfast marked the largest MLK Day event of its kind in Illinois, according to a press release from Rajinder Singh Mago, a leading Punjabi activist in the Midwest.



PHOTOS: COURTESY RAJINDER SINGH MAGO

MLK Day Celebration_2026_Sikh Prayer by Bhai Mohinder Singh of Wheaton Gurdwara with other interfaith presenters.

Orchestrated by the Dr. Martin Luther King Fund of the DuPage Foundation, the program commenced with an opening blessing delivered by several interfaith leaders including Bhai Mohinder Singh, representing the Sikh community Gurdwara of Wheaton (Illinois Sikh Commu-

nity Center).

During the event, the "Open Door Award" was presented to Stephen L. Davis in recognition of his exemplary leadership and dedication to fostering inclusivity in the community.



When Mr. Singh met Dr. King
UNITED FOR JUSTICE AND EQUALITY

One of the displays at the Oakbrook, Ill., celebration of MLK Day January 19, 2026.



MLK Day Celebration January 19, 2026, at Drury Lane Breakfast in Oakbrook, Ill., attended by many from the Sikh community.

DHS Eliminates One-Year Foreign Residency Requirement for R-1 Religious Workers

By David H. Nachman, Esq

IN MEMORIAM



Michael Phulwani



David Nachman



Ludka Zimovcak



Snehal Batra

In a significant policy shift, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has issued an interim final rule that removes the long-standing one-year foreign residency requirement for certain R-1 religious workers who reach the maximum five-year period of stay in the United States. This change is effective immediately and is expected to bring meaningful relief to religious organizations across the country.

Why This Change Matters for Religious Organizations

For years, religious organizations faced serious operational challenges when key clergy and religious workers were forced to remain outside the United States for at least one year before seeking reentry in R-1 status. This often resulted in staffing gaps, interrupted services, and hardship for faith-based communities.

Under the new DHS rule:

- R-1 religious workers must still depart the U.S. after reaching the five-year maximum stay
- However, they are no longer required to remain outside the U.S. for a full year before applying for readmission
- This allows eligible workers to return more quickly and resume their religious duties

This update applies to a wide range of religious workers, including ministers and non-ministerial workers such as priests, nuns, rabbis, and other qualifying religious professionals.

Connection to EB-4 Visa Backlogs

The rule change also addresses ongoing delays in the EB-4 Special Immigrant Religious Worker category. Demand for EB-4 visas has exceeded annual limits for many years, and changes implemented by the Department of State in 2023 further increased wait times for certain countries.

As a result, many religious workers have been unable to transition from R-1 status to permanent residence before exhausting their five-year limit. By eliminating the one-year foreign residency requirement, DHS is helping religious organizations maintain continuity while workers navigate lengthy immigrant visa backlogs.

Immediate Effect and Public Comment Period

The interim final rule is effective immediately, meaning religious organizations and workers can rely on the new policy now. USCIS has also opened a 60-day public comment period following publication in the Federal Register, allowing stakeholders to provide feedback on the rule.

Practical Impact for R-1 Employers and Workers

This change may be especially important if:

- A religious worker has reached or is approaching the five-year R-1 limit
- The organization relies on the worker for essential services
- An EB-4 immigrant petition is pending or delayed due to visa backlogs

Strategic planning is still essential, as eligibility, timing, and travel considerations can vary depending on the individual case.

How NPZ Law Group Can Help

Nachman, Phulwani, Zimovcak (NPZ) Law Group, P.C. has extensive experience assisting religious organizations and workers with R-1 visas, EB-4 petitions, extensions, and long-term immigration planning. Our team closely monitors DHS and USCIS policy updates and advises clients on how new rules may affect their immigration options. If your organization or religious worker may benefit from this rule change, professional guidance can help ensure compliance while minimizing disruptions.

FAQ

Does this rule eliminate the five-year R-1 maximum stay?

No. The five-year statutory maximum remains in place. The rule only removes the one-year foreign residency requirement after departure.

Can R-1 workers remain in the U.S. without leaving after five years?

No. Departure is still required, but there is no longer a mandatory minimum time abroad before reapplying.

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Does this change apply to EB-4 immigrant visas?

The rule does not change EB-4 visa limits, but it helps address gaps caused by long EB-4 processing delays.

Is the rule permanent?

The rule is currently an interim final rule and is effective immediately. DHS is accepting public comments for 60 days.

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.



How Bad Is Delhi's Air? Like Smoking Half A Pack Of Cigarettes

By PRANSHU VERMA, SUPRIYA KUMAR, KEVIN CROWE

Tens of millions of people in India's capital city are breathing in polluted air that is equivalent to smoking roughly nine cigarettes a day, or about half of a standard pack, according to a Washington Post analysis of 2½ months of government data.

Every winter, for months at a time, Delhi is blanketed by toxic smog, and this year has been no different. Though people try to limit the time they spend outside, children need to go to school, parents need to go to the office, and most days the roadways are still choked with motorcycles and scooters and rickshaws, navigating through a sepia haze. Delivery drivers, bricklayers and others who spend their days outdoors are especially vulnerable.

To quantify the toxicity of the air and its impact on human health, The Post analyzed 75 days of Indian government pollution data – spanning Oct. 18 to Dec. 31 – from 40 air monitoring stations spread across the capital region. Each station collects hourly data on chemicals in the atmosphere, such as particulate matter 2.5 (PM 2.5) and particulate matter 10 (PM 10), which are known to cause lung and heart issues when inhaled in large amounts.

Reporters calculated the daily average of PM 2.5, the most harmful measure of India's poisonous air, then converted those figures into daily cigarette intake using a formula developed by scientists at the University of California at Berkeley. The Post verified its calculations with researchers at the University of Chicago and the Center for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA), an independent climate think tank that provided the government pollution data.

While the data averaged out to nine cigarettes a day per person across Delhi, some days were much worse – and some neighborhoods were more adversely affected. On Dec. 14, for example, Delhiites inhaled air that was as toxic as smoking almost 18 cigarettes a day. And in Wazirpur, an industrial area in the city's northwest, residents breathed in a daily average of 12 cigarettes.

Despite numerous government initiatives over the years to purify the winter air in Delhi, it remains as toxic as ever. After analyzing and converting data from roughly the same period a decade ago – covering November 2015 to January 2016 – reporters arrived at the same figure: nine cigarettes a day, on average.

Tanushree Ganguly, director of the Air Quality Life Index at the University of Chicago's Energy Policy Institute in New Delhi, said India's sustained pollution crisis is due in large part to the government's "reactive" approach – favoring temporary emergency measures, like the use of water sprinklers to reduce dust, instead of proactive efforts, such as limiting vehicular and industrial emissions.

"We are not going to see any significant decline in pollution levels going forward," Ganguly said. "People are losing years from their life."

India's Ministry of Environment, Delhi's Office of the Chief Minister and Delhi's Department of Environment did not respond to requests for comment.

No solutions in sight

Air pollution in Delhi intensified in the mid-1990s as the Indian economy opened up and the nation's capital underwent rapid industrialization and urban growth. More vehicles clogged the roads and more factories spewed out chemical clouds. Cities struggled with sanitation and waste management issues.

Alarmed in part by rising air contamination, India's Supreme Court in 1996 ordered the highest-emitting factories in Delhi to relocate or shut down. But the crisis far outpaced efforts to track it: an automated air-quality monitoring network wasn't set up until 2015. By then, pollution levels were already extreme. Data from the World Health Organization (WHO) showed that in 2010,



PHOTO: SUPRIYA KUMAR/FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Neetu Kumari holds her 16-month-old son outside her mother's street-side home. "I'm scared for my kids. I'm scared for my family," she says about their breathing difficulties.

the city's annual average concentration of PM 2.5 stood at 153 micrograms per cubic meter, more than 30 times the WHO's recommended limit.

Not much has changed in the years since. During the 2015 pollution season, Delhi's average PM 2.5 level stood at 207, roughly equal to nine cigarettes per day. The only noticeable dip occurred in 2020, which scientists largely attributed to India's pandemic lockdown measures.

On average, Delhi residents are losing eight years of their lives, according to the University of Chicago's Air Quality Life Index, which calculates the effect of exposure to PM 2.5 on life expectancy.

Soutrik Goswami, an independent climate policy researcher in India, said the pollution crisis is mostly driven by emissions from public transportation – such as buses, cabs and auto rickshaws – and personal vehicles. Another leading contributor is coal-burning power plants, he added, built to meet the capital's rising energy demands. The air quality is particularly dire in winter due to a weather phenomenon known as temperature inversion, in which cold air traps pollutants and keeps them from dispersing.

In 2019, the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi set up the National Clean Air Program, outlining measures aimed at bringing down pollution levels in major cities. These included the widespread adoption of electric vehicles, government assistance in crop residue management to prevent stubble burning and new emission standards for thermal power plants.

But the program has done little to make the air here more breathable, and politicians have traded blame for the crisis. New Delhi was governed by the opposition Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) for the last decade before Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) took over in February.

Its first winter in charge has been a disaster, according to activists. A government attempt at cloud seeding, a technique used to induce artificial rain to clear the air, ended in failure. The city dispatched water sprinkler trucks across the region, which has minimal effects on pollution levels, according to Ganguly, and was widely mocked by environmentalists.

"We're dealing with a massive public health crisis," Goswami said, "and we are not seeing any long-term solutions."

Public comments from leading BJP officials have raised concerns over whether the government understands the gravity and complexity of the problem. New Delhi's chief minister, Rekha Gupta, said on Dec. 6 that the Air Quality

Index, or AQI, a measure of air cleanliness, "is like temperature" and can be measured using "any device." In fact, AQI is derived from a complex math formula using several pollutant measurements and requires specific monitoring technology.

In India's Parliament, Kirti Vardhan Singh, a BJP minister of state for environment and climate change, wrongly claimed last month that there was no data that showed a link between high pollution levels and lung diseases.

Neither Gupta nor Singh responded to a request for comment.

'I don't have a choice'

Neetu Kumari wishes she and her three young children didn't have to spend so much time outside during the winter months, but her 70-year-old mother, a frail and ailing widow, lives in a street-side shack and needs help with almost everything.

Kumari's 16-month-old boy is coughing constantly, she said. And her mother is having intense breathing difficulties, but can't leave the city without sacrificing her monthly pension.

"I'm scared for my kids," said Kumari, 28. "I'm scared for my family."

There is growing public awareness about the severity of the crisis. Manoj Kumar, an analyst at CREA, said many residents have been unsettled by discrepancies between government data and the readings on their personal air-quality monitors, which often show higher pollution levels. While the differences are largely legitimate, he said – stemming from variations in measurement models and methods – the unease points to a deeper erosion of trust.

India caps AQI readings at 500, arguing that levels beyond that are equally dangerous and that higher numbers could fuel public panic. "This does not mean PM 2.5 concentrations aren't increasing, but the AQI will not reflect that," Kumar said. And higher PM 2.5 levels, he added, translate directly into more severe health risks.

Civil society and climate activists, joined by students and anxious parents, have organized several protests in recent months, demanding urgent government action. Online campaigns have called for greater data transparency, and more funding for research and interventions.

Bhavreen Kandhari, who in September 2020 co-founded Warrior Moms, a collective of parents fighting for the right to clean air, has seen her own children suffer. Her 22-year-old twin daughters were born three months premature, and are more prone to cardiac and respiratory issues. They've had a "continuous cough" during this pollution season, she said, and recover as soon as they leave the city.

"That's why we protested," Kandhari said, describing the government response as "disheartening."

Frontline doctors and medical experts are also sounding the alarm. Exposure to highly polluted air doesn't just lead to lung issues, it can also cause serious heart problems, said Nityanand Tripathi, the head of the cardiology department at Fortis Hospital in the city's northwest. "We're seeing an increase in heart attack rates," he said. "We should all be worried."

Impoverished Indians bear the brunt of the crisis. Most air purifiers cost more than a laborer's monthly paycheck. Escaping to the coast or the mountains is impossible for millions of low-wage workers, and few can afford protective gear.

Vijay Kumar, 31, works at a steel factory in the Wazirpur neighborhood. When the air is bad, he said, he suffers from frequent headaches, chest congestion and bouts of coughing. He moved his family from Bihar, in India's northeast, to the capital in search of work, and now feels trapped.

"If there were jobs back in my village, I would go back," he said. "I'm here because I don't have a choice."

-THE WASHINGTON POST

The Washington Post

By Natalie B. Compton

TSA's Faster PreCheck Lane Is Expanding To More Airports

A faster way to get through airport security may be coming to an airport near you. TSA PreCheck Touchless ID, a new program that uses facial recognition, is expanding to 65 airports this spring. The expansion will prioritize 2026 World Cup host cities, where travel is expected to surge, said Transportation Security Administration spokesperson R. Carter Langston.

"Passengers seem to absolutely appreciate it - the speed, the efficiency," Langston said. "All they show is their face, and the officer just waves them right into the checkpoint. No hassling with passports or IDs or phones."

TSA launched the first iteration of the program in 2021 in partnership with Delta Air Lines at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport. It's now available for five airlines across 22 airports.

Critics worry that the program raises privacy concerns. It is voluntary, and travelers can opt out at any time and use a standard ID verification instead.

What is PreCheck Touchless ID?

TSA said in an email that the initiative is a joint effort from U.S. Customs and Border Protection, airports and airlines that allows travelers "to move through dedicated lanes with ease, enjoying a smoother and more convenient airport experience."

The program uses the CBP Traveler Verification Service to create "a secure biometric template of a passenger's live facial image taken at the checkpoint and matches it against a gallery of templates of pre-staged photos that the passenger previously provided to the government (e.g., U.S. Passport or Visa)," the agency website said.

Who is eligible for PreCheck Touchless ID?

To use the program, fliers must be a current TSA PreCheck member with a valid "known traveler number" and an active airline profile (such as being enrolled in a loyalty program). They must also have a valid passport uploaded to their airline profile.

The airlines currently participating in the program include:

- Alaska
- American
- Delta
- Southwest
- United

TSA PreCheck Touchless ID offers current TSA PreCheck members an expedited airport security screening by way of "facial comparison technology."

It's only available at select airports, through participating airlines - which vary. For example, travelers at John F. Kennedy International Airport, but only if they are flying with Alaska, American or Delta. It is available at George Bush Intercontinental in Houston, but only for passengers flying with American. For a list of availability, visit the TSA website.

How can travelers opt in?

To use the program, travelers must first opt in through their airline's website or app before checking in to their flight.

The process varies by airline, but you can generally find the prompt under a "travel documents" section (where you add your known traveler number or passport details) of your airline loyalty program app or website.

American Airlines customers, for example, will find the opt-in choice toward the bottom of the "Information and password" page of their AAdvantage profile, while Alaska Airlines customers should go to their account settings, then click into the "travel documents" section.

Once travelers have opted in, then checked in for their flight, a TSA PreCheck Touchless ID symbol should then appear on their boarding pass. If the symbol is not on your boarding pass, you won't be able to use the lane, even if you show an employee that you are enrolled in the program.

At the airport, travelers should follow signs to a separate TSA PreCheck Touchless ID lane. Instead of handing an ID over to an officer to verify your identity, you'll instead pause to scan your face, then keep moving.

Is it really faster?

It can be, for two reasons.

First: There is no slowdown to hand over and scan your ID; travelers must only pause during their walk through the line dividers before proceeding to the X-ray machines.

Second: Because the program is new, requires signing up in advance and is not available for every airline, it's getting a fraction of the traffic that regular security, Clear or PreCheck lanes are.

We've had mixed results. When it works, it's incredible; you really are through in seconds.



Photo by: Sheddick Peit

But we've also been delayed when the facial comparison machine was undergoing maintenance and out of use, sending us back into the longer PreCheck lane.

Which airports offer PreCheck Touchless ID?

TSA PreCheck Touchless ID is already available at 22 airports (however, participating airlines will vary; check the TSA website for more information):

- Boston Logan International Airport
- Charlotte Douglas International Airport
- Chicago O'Hare International Airport
- Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport
- Denver International Airport
- Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport
- Dulles International Airport
- George Bush Intercontinental Airport
- Harry Reid International Airport in Las Vegas
- Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport
- John F. Kennedy International Airport
- LaGuardia Airport
- Los Angeles International Airport
- Minneapolis-Saint Paul International Airport
- Newark Liberty International Airport
- Palm Beach International Airport
- Philadelphia International Airport
- Portland International Airport in Oregon
- Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport
- Salt Lake City International Airport
- San Francisco International Airport
- Seattle-Tacoma International Airport

What are the privacy concerns?

The TSA is using more facial recognition at the airport, including in regular security lanes and CBP checks.

The CBP says its Enhanced Passenger Processing involves taking a traveler's photo using "auto capture technology" to simplify the inspection and adjudication process.

Travelers can also use biometric screenings to speed through Global Entry, using a CBP app.

TSA says on its website that it may share your information with "CBP, DHS S&T, or others as necessary." The agency confirmed that includes sharing information about travelers with Immigration and Customs Enforcement to check for deportation orders.

There has been a bipartisan effort to put more guardrails on its use at airports. In 2019, the Department of Homeland Security said that photos of travelers were taken in a data breach, accessed through the network of one of its subcontractors. (TSA says its databases are encrypted).

A new Senate bill would allow officers to continue scanning travelers' faces if they opt in; it would ban the technology's use for anything other than verifying identities. It would also require the agency to immediately delete the scans once the check is complete.

If you change your mind about TSA PreCheck Touchless ID, you can opt out at any time and ask for standard ID verification instead. You can opt out of any facial recognition at the airport by saying, "I'd prefer a standard ID check."

The agency also says it deletes photos and personal data within 24 hours of scheduled flight departures. The TSA website's FAQ section addresses some privacy concerns and says that all data collected during facial comparison checks is protected.

NASA Astronaut Sunita Williams, An Icon For Indian Americans And Others Worldwide, Has Retired

BY A STAFF WRITER

After making history more than once, and serving nearly 3 decades at NASA, Indian American astronaut Sunita Williams is retiring. The agency announced her resignation January 20, 2026, three weeks after it became effective on December 27, 2025.

In her 27 years of service, NASA astronaut 'Suni' Williams completed three missions aboard the International Space Station, setting numerous human spaceflight records throughout her career.

"Suni Williams has been a trailblazer in human spaceflight, shaping the future of exploration through her leadership aboard the space station and paving the way for commercial missions to low Earth orbit," NASA Administrator Jared Isaacman is quoted saying in the press release. "Her work advancing science and technology has laid the foundation for Artemis missions to the Moon and advancing toward Mars, and her extraordinary achievements will continue to inspire generations to dream big and push the boundaries of what's possible. Congratulations on your well-deserved retirement, and thank you for your service to NASA and our nation."

Williams logged 608 days in space — second on the list of cumulative time in space by a NASA astronaut. She ranks sixth on the list of longest single spaceflight by an American, tied with NASA astronaut Butch Wilmore, both logging 286 days during NASA's Boeing Starliner and SpaceX Crew-9 missions.



NASA astronaut Suni Williams at Cape Canaveral Air Force Station's Naval Ordnance Test Unit basin in Florida on March 28, 2018.

Williams, who is revered the world over, particularly by Indian Americans and by Indians in India, also completed nine spacewalks, totaling 62 hours and 6 minutes. **That is a record – she ranks at the top as the most spacewalk time by a woman** and fourth-most on the all-time cumulative spacewalk duration list.

Williams was also was first person to run a marathon in space.

"Over the course of Suni's impressive career trajectory, she has been a pioneering leader," said Vanessa Wyche, director of NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston. "From her indelible contributions and achievements to the space station, to her groundbreaking test flight role during the Boeing Starliner mission, her exceptional dedication to the mission will inspire the future generations of explorers."

Williams launched for the first time aboard space shuttle Discovery with STS-116 in December 2006 and returned aboard space shuttle Atlantis with the STS-117 crew. She served as a flight engineer for Expeditions 14/15 and completed a then-record-breaking four spacewalks during the mission.

In 2012, Williams launched from the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan for a 127-day mission as a member of Expedition 32/33. She also served as space station commander for Expedition 33. Williams performed three spacewalks during the mission to repair a leak on a station radiator and replace a component that gets power from the station's solar arrays to its systems.

Most recently, Williams and Wilmore launched aboard the Starliner spacecraft in June 2024 as part of NASA's Boeing Crew Flight Test mission. She and Wilmore went on to join Expedition 71/72, and Williams again took command of the space station for Expedition 72. She completed two spacewalks on the mission and returned to Earth in March 2025, close to a year in space due to technical issues. She returned as part of the agency's SpaceX Crew-9 mission.

"Suni is incredibly sharp, and an all-around great friend and colleague," said Scott Tingle, chief of the Astronaut Office at NASA Johnson. "She's inspired so many people, including myself and other astronauts in the corps. We're all going to miss her greatly and wish her nothing but the best."

Beyond her spaceflight experience, Williams held numerous roles throughout her NASA career. In 2002, she served as a NEEMO (NASA Extreme Environments Mission Operations) crew member, spending nine days living and working in an underwater habitat. After her first flight, she served as deputy chief of NASA's Astronaut Office. She later was the director of Operations in Star City, Russia, following her second mission to the space station. Most recently, she helped establish a helicopter training platform to prepare astronauts for future



Indian American astronaut Commander Sunita Williams, addressing the White House Diwali gathering October 28, 2024, from the International Space Station.

Moon landings.

A native of Needham, Massachusetts, Williams holds a bachelor's degree in physical science from the United States Naval Academy and a master's degree in engineering management from Florida Institute of Technology in Melbourne, Florida. A retired U.S. Navy captain, Williams is an accomplished helicopter and fixed-wing pilot, having logged more than 4,000 flight hours in 40 different aircraft.

"Anyone who knows me knows that space is my absolute favorite place to be," said Williams. "It's been an incredible honor to have served in the Astronaut Office and have had the opportunity to fly in space three times. I had an amazing 27-year career at NASA, and that is mainly because of all the wonderful love and support I've received from my colleagues. The International Space Station, the people, the engineering, and the science are truly awe-inspiring and have made the next steps of exploration to the Moon and Mars possible. I hope the foundation we set has made these bold steps a little easier. I am super excited for NASA and its partner agencies as we take these next steps, and I can't wait to watch the agency make history."



Astronaut Sunita Williams speaking at the Kerala Literature Festival held January 21-24, 2026, in Kottayam.



American astronaut Sunita Williams, center, with R. Madhavan, right, and ISRO scientist Nambi Narayan, left, pose for a photo during the visit of the makers of Rocketry: The Nambi Effect, to be released July 1, 2022.

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

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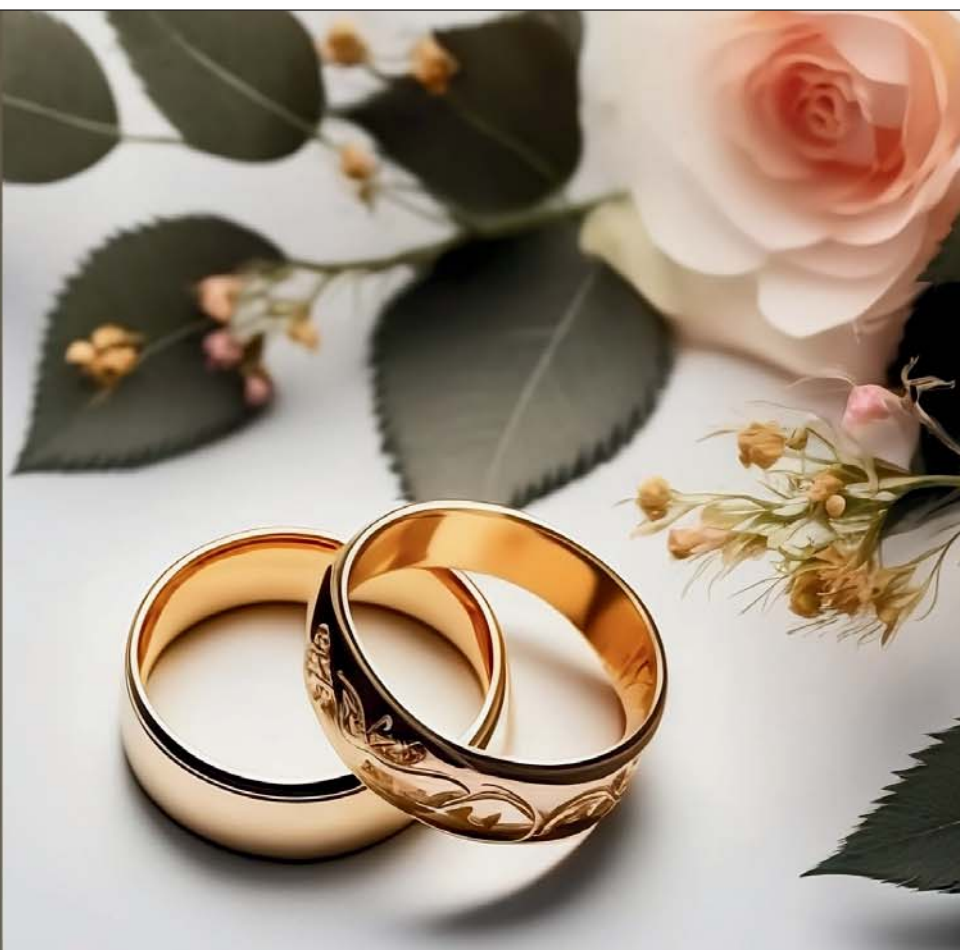
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