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February 13, 2026
Chicago, IL.
Vol. XXX, No. 7
www.desitalkchicago.com

Published by
Parikh Worldwide Media, LLC.

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Modi adopted strong line to clinch US trade deal; Sent message of India's resilience through Doval: Bloomberg report



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Published weekly
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Modi Adopted Strong Line To Clinch US Trade Deal; Sent Message Of India's Resilience Through Doval

BY SUDHI RANJAN SEN, DAN STRUMPF AND SHRUTI SRIVASTAVA

In early September, shortly after Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi held a chummy meeting with Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping in China, he dispatched his national security adviser to Washington to help smooth over fraying ties.

Ajit Doval came with a message for Secretary of State Marco Rubio: India wanted to put the acrimony between the two nations behind it and get back to negotiating a trade deal, according to officials in New Delhi familiar with the meeting, who asked not to be identified because the discussions were private.

Doval told Rubio that India wouldn't be bullied by US President Donald Trump and his top aides, the people said, and would be willing to wait out his term, having faced other hostile US administrations in the past. But New Delhi wanted Trump and his aides to dial down their public criticism of India so they could get relations back on track, Doval said in the meeting.

At the time, India was smarting from Trump's insults and the 50% tariffs he'd slapped on its goods in August. The US president had called India a "dead" economy with high tariffs and that it was funding Putin's war in Ukraine by buying Russian oil.

It wasn't long after Doval's meeting, which was previously unreported, that the first signs of an ease in tensions emerged. On Sept. 16, Trump called Modi on his birthday and praised him for doing a "tremendous job." By the end of the year, the two leaders had spoken four more times on the phone as they inched toward a deal to bring down the tariffs.

Randhir Jaiswal, spokesman for India's Ministry of External Affairs, denied that the Doval-Rubio meeting took place when asked about it at a regular briefing on Thursday. A spokesperson for the US State Department said that in keeping with standard diplomatic practice, it does not disclose the details of private discussions.

On Monday, Trump announced he'd



U.S. President Donald Trump and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi prepare to shake hands as they attend a joint press conference at the White House in Washington, D.C., U.S., February 13, 2025.

Breaking:
India and the U.S. expect to sign a formal trade deal in March, after which New Delhi will lower tariffs on U.S. goods, Trade Minister Piyush Goyal said on Thursday, giving the first official timeline for the deal's adoption."

-REUTERS

reached a trade agreement with Modi that would reduce tariffs on India's goods to 18%, lower than most of its peers in Asia. A punitive 25% duty that the US leader had slapped on India for buying Russian oil was also scrapped. In turn, Trump said, India agreed to purchase \$500 billion of US goods, switch to buying Venezuelan

oil, and reduce tariffs on US imports to zero. Modi's government hasn't confirmed those details and neither side has published any documentation to codify the agreement.

"The past year has been one where negotiators, both in the US and India worked feverishly to get us to this point," Nisha Biswal, partner at The Asia Group and former US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs, said in an interview with Bloomberg TV. "It benefits both the US and India that you have an India that is finally really opening up on global trade."

Publicly, there had been no indication from either side that a deal was imminent. As recently as last week, US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer said India still had a long way to go to convince Washington it was halting Russia crude buys.

On Monday, officials in New Delhi were taken by surprise when Trump posted about the deal on social media. Many senior bureaucrats in the foreign and commerce ministries, even those who had

been directly involved in the trade negotiations, were oblivious that a call had been scheduled between the leaders that day. Some were unable to confirm key details related to the tariff announcement when contacted by reporters late in the day.

Behind the scenes, though, New Delhi had been working to get relations gradually back on track. Doval's meeting with Rubio in September was a signal to Washington that it sees the US as a long-term strategic partner and couldn't afford to allow ties to deteriorate further.

The prevailing view in New Delhi was that India needed US capital, technology and military cooperation to deter China and meet Modi's goals of making the South Asian nation a developed economy by 2047. Trump was just a blip over that time frame, officials in New Delhi said, and India needs to stay focused on doing what's best over the long term.

"New Delhi was never going to sever relations with Washington following last year's downturn in bilateral relations," said Chietigi Bajpae, a senior research fellow for South Asia at Chatham House. "India-US relations remain 'sticky' given the plethora of institutionalized and people-to-people linkages between both countries."

"That being said," he added, "the irrational exuberance that marked New Delhi's earlier assessments of the bilateral relationship have faded."

Relations had spiraled downward ever since Trump claimed credit in May for resolving a four-day clash between India and neighboring Pakistan, a boast that Modi vehemently rejected. In a tense call between the two leaders in June, Modi declined Trump's request to come to the White House, where the US president was hosting Pakistan's army chief at the time. In October, Modi skipped a summit in Malaysia to avoid a possibly awkward meeting with Trump.

The arrival of new US Ambassador Sergio Gor to New Delhi in December appeared to kick off more serious efforts to get relations back on an even keel. Gor, a former senior White House official and longtime member of Trump's inner circle who is also close to Rubio, has repeatedly underscored the importance of US-India ties.

In his first public speech in his new role, Gor cast the tensions between the two countries as disagreements among "real friends," which he said both sides were sure to resolve. He also announced India would be invited to join a US-led alliance, called Pax Silica, to strengthen supply chains.

A further thaw in ties was evident during a meeting between Gor and External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar last week, according to people familiar with the matter. Gor said in a social-media post that the two sides discussed "everything from defense, trade, critical minerals, and working toward our common



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping ahead of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Summit 2025 at the Meijiang C onvention and Exhibition Centre in Tianjin, China, September 1, 2025.



Narendra Modi with the European Council's Antonio Costa and the European Commission's Ursula von der Leyen in New Delhi on Jan. 27.

-CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

Community in Grief as Pioneer Leaves Behind Enduring Legacy

By A Staff Writer

Des Plaines, Ill. — The community is mourning the loss of Ashraf Ali, a respected leader, entrepreneur and longtime advocate, who passed away Sunday morning, Jan. 25, 2026. He leaves behind a legacy of service, innovation and dedication that shaped institutions and touched countless lives across the Chicago area.

Ali served as President of the Development Corporation of America, based in Des Plaines. The company operates primarily in the real estate sector, specializing in subdivision and development projects. An engineer by training, Ali was also part of the team at the internationally renowned architectural firm Skidmore that helped construct the iconic Sears Tower — now known as Willis Tower. Over the course of his career, he contributed his expertise to numerous architectural projects throughout Chicago.

Beyond his professional accomplishments, Ali devoted more than three decades to serving the Asian community through nonprofit work. He was the longest-serving member of the Board of Directors at AHS Family Health Center and made history as the organization's first Board Chairperson when it became a Federally Qualified Health Center in the early 2000s. He also served as Board Treasurer.

Ali's background in construction and development proved instrumental in the health center's growth. His leadership helped guide the expansion of AHS Family Health Center to four locations, and he played a key role in completing its headquarters at 6301 N. Western Ave.

News of his passing has prompted an outpouring of condolences from colleagues and community members.

"Mr. Ashraf Ali, a long-term Board Director and the first AHS Family Health Center Board Chair, influenced



PHOTO PROVIDED BY FAMILY

Mr. Ashraf Ali

every strategic decision and growth of our organization for more than two decades with his unmatched enthusiasm," said Dr. Muhammad Paracha, CEO of AHS Family Health Center. "He served the Asian community well and will be remembered for all the impactful work he has done for the Asian and Bangladeshi communities."

James Luciano, current Board Chair of AHS Family Health Center, said, "Mr. Ali's contributions were very impactful and too many to count. He has truly made each one of us better, and now it's our responsibility to carry on with that passion and integrity."

Dr. Larry Williams, Board Vice Chair, described Ali as "a great person and mentor" who "will be missed."

Board Treasurer Mahmood Khan added, "Mr. Ali was an integral part of our community, and his presence will be deeply missed. He treated everyone with respect. My thoughts and prayers are with his family during this difficult time."

Dr. Ayesha Hussain, Chief Medical Officer, noted that Ali was involved with AHS Family Health Center from its inception. "His dedication and unwavering commitment to serving underserved communities was exceptional. His passing represents a significant loss to our organization and to the communities we serve."

Dr. Lisa Beaudette-Nguyen, Chief Dental Officer, called him "a strong supporter of our clinic," adding that the organization "will always be grateful for his impact on our health center and community."

Paul Nagpal, Chief Financial Officer, described Ali as "an inspirational leader" whose legacy should be celebrated.

Members of the AHS Family Health Center Board and staff expressed their sorrow, including board members Fe Cabrera, Mariam Hassan, Elsadig Elmehdi, Marivic Guitierrez, Anabelle Cortes and Dr. Rohitkumar Vasa, along with staff members Khalid Sabzwari, Emina Celik, Mosharraf Khandaker, Ranjana Khan and former board member Abha Pandya.

Ali is survived by his wife, son, daughter and grandchildren. Family members said they will cherish his memory and continue to celebrate the legacy of a man whose vision and service strengthened both his profession and his community.

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Analysis: US, India Unveil Interim Trade Framework, Move Closer To Broad Pact

By JARRETT RENSHAW, DAVID LAWDER AND MANOJ KUMAR

The United States and India moved closer to a trade pact on Friday, releasing an interim framework that would lower tariffs, reshape energy ties and deepen economic cooperation as both countries seek to realign global supply chains.

The framework reaffirms a commitment to negotiations toward a broader bilateral trade agreement, the two governments said in a joint statement, while noting that further negotiations were needed to complete the pact.

Separately, U.S. President Donald Trump in an executive order removed the additional 25% tariff imposed on Indian goods for Russian oil purchases as New Delhi “committed to stop directly or indirectly importing” Russian oil.

However, U.S. officials will monitor and recommend reinstating the tariff if India resumes oil procurement from Russia, the order said, as Washington maintains pressure on India to restrict energy ties with Moscow.

The India-U.S. joint statement did not mention India’s Russian oil purchases or a formal pledge from India to confirm the move.

Trump announced a deal with India on Monday to cut U.S. tariffs on Indian goods to 18% from 50% in exchange for India halting purchases of Russian oil and lowering trade barriers.

Half of the 50% rate had been imposed separately by Trump as punishment for India’s purchases of Russian oil, which he said were fuelling Moscow’s war effort in Ukraine. Trump signed an executive order on Friday rescinding that 25% portion after India agreed this week to shift its oil buying to the U.S. and Venezuela.

However, the statement indicated that New Delhi resisted Washington’s push to broadly open its agricultural market.

Trade Minister Piyush Goyal said the agreement safeguards farmers’ interests and rural livelihoods by “completely protecting sensitive agricultural and dairy products.”

Imports of genetically modified agricultural products would not be directly allowed as there was no such provision in the pact, while fruits like apples would allowed under a tariff quota, he said at a press briefing.

On Russian oil, Goyal declined to comment, saying the



PHOTO: REUTERS/ADNAN ABIDI/FILE PHOTO

U.S. President Donald Trump and India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi arrive for their joint news conference at Hyderabad House in New Delhi, India, February 25, 2020.

foreign ministry would respond.

India’s opposition Congress party, however, said the trade deal was concluded on U.S. terms and hurt farmers and traders, calling the pact a “complete surrender” of national interests.

NEW DETAILS ON TARIFF REDUCTIONS

Friday’s joint statement provides additional details compared with initial outlines of the trade deal revealed by Trump on Monday.

It confirms that India will purchase \$500 billion in U.S. goods over a five-year period, including oil, gas, coking coal, aircraft and aircraft parts, precious metals, and technology products. The last category includes graphics processing units, typically used for AI applications, and other goods used in data centers.

It said India would eliminate or reduce tariffs on all U.S. industrial goods and a wide range of U.S. food and agricultural products, including dried distillers’ grains and red sorghum for animal feed, tree nuts, fresh and processed fruit, soybean oil, wine and spirits.

U.S. TO KEEP 18% TARIFF

But the deal will apply an 18% tariff rate on most

imports to the U.S. from India, including textiles and apparel, leather and footwear, plastic and rubber, organic chemicals, home decor, artisanal products and certain machinery.

India will get the same tariff relief granted to other allied countries that have signed trade deals with the United States on certain aircraft and aircraft parts, and will receive a quota for auto parts imports that will be subject to a lower tariff rate, according to the statement.

Depending on the results of the Trump administration’s tariff investigation into pharmaceuticals and their ingredients, “India will receive negotiated outcomes with respect to generic pharmaceuticals and ingredients,” the statement said.

Goyal hailed the framework agreement as opening a market worth \$30 trillion – the U.S. annual GDP – to Indian exporters, especially farmers, fishermen, and micro and small-to-medium enterprises.

Goyal had said on Thursday that Washington and New Delhi aimed to sign a formal trade agreement in March, after which India’s tariff cuts on U.S. exports would go into effect.

ACCEPTING U.S. STANDARDS

India also agreed to address longstanding non-tariff barriers on imports of agricultural products, medical devices and communications gear, with negotiations to be completed within six months on an agreement to accept U.S. or international safety and licensing standards for product imports.

The U.S. affirmed that it intends to consider India’s requests for lower tariffs on Indian goods during further negotiations of the bilateral trade agreement. The two sides also agreed to cooperate on enforcement of export controls on sensitive technologies and take actions to address “non-market policies of third parties,” a reference to China.

The United States and India have struggled for years to conclude a full trade deal, with disputes spanning agriculture, digital trade, medical devices and market access. But strategic concerns — including competition with China, supply-chain diversification and energy security — have injected new urgency into talks, officials in both countries say.

-REUTERS

Modi Adopted Strong Line To Clinch US Trade Deal; Sent Message Of India’s Resilience Through Doval

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interests,” adding: “Stay tuned for much more!”

Jaishankar is currently in the US, where he’s held talks with Rubio on trade and supply chains.

“This appears to conclude a difficult six-month period for US-India relations,” said Alexander Slater, former India head of the US-India Business Council. “It also adds to recent signals about where India’s economic future is likely headed” and “removes a key impediment to what had been India’s gradual but steady alignment with the West.”

Despite the rapprochement, India has reason to proceed cautiously with Trump, and is keen to assert its strategic

autonomy. Modi’s viral moment with Xi and Putin, clapping hands and chuckling together, was meant to show Trump that it has other options, officials in New Delhi said. Modi rolled out the red carpet for Putin in December, showcasing ties with a country that remains an important source of weapons and diplomatic support dating back to the Cold War.

Last week, Modi clinched a free trade pact with the European Union after almost two decades of talks, coming just months after India’s trade deal with the UK – deals that showed India was serious about diversifying its trade relationships in the face of the impasse with the US, according to an official aware of the details.

Later this month, Modi will host Canada’s Mark Carney and Brazil’s Luiz Inacio

Lula da Silva in New Delhi, further using Trump’s new world order to forge closer economic and political ties with so-called “middle power” countries.

Still, the US remains a crucial partner for India, both as a market and as a source of investment. The nation ships about a fifth of its exports to the US, a large share of which are mobile phones and electronic goods, sectors that are key to Modi’s manufacturing ambitions. US companies lined up big investment pledges in India in recent months, especially in AI, including a combined pledge of \$52 billion by Amazon.com Inc. and Microsoft Corp. in December. Alphabet Inc.’s Google announced \$15 billion of investment in data centers in October.

India is also becoming more important

for the US financial industry. Goldman Sachs Group Inc. has its biggest office outside of New York in the southern Indian city of Bengaluru, where it provides sophisticated IT and financial technology support to clients around the world.

“The larger geopolitical factors or strategic factors that bind Indian and the US together are still in place,” said Milan Vaishnav, director of the South Asia Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. “India requires a great amount of capital, of investment, of technology transfer, investments. So the US is critical.”

(THIS ARTICLE APPEARED IN THE WASHINGTON POST/BLOOMBERG SYNDICATED SERVICE FEB. 5, 2026).



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On behalf of Life Global, USA, we express our sincere gratitude to distinguished business leaders and philanthropists Rika and Manu Shah of California for their generous support, extended through our partner charity Project 'Life', India, towards the development of four of the ten, Sarva Mangal Family Trust Primary Schools & Shah Happiness Foundation Primary Schools at Vaghar, Gundakhada, Ghuntu and Nichi Mandal villages in Morbi district of Gujarat State. These landmark achievements mark the 116th and 117th schools of Project 'Life', collectively benefitting over 30,000 students.

This noble support further enabled the Shah Happiness Foundation–Life Vertical Gardening Initiative, launched as a model project at Navnat UK Primary School, Jabalpur village, Morbi, and the Pilot Project of SHAH HAPPINESS FOUNDATION–LIFE Thalassaemia Screening & Awareness Program 2026 at Nichi Mandal, together reflecting an integrated vision of environmental care, preventive healthcare, and quality education, empowering rural communities and safeguarding future generations with dignity and sustainability. These initiatives stand as living examples of how compassion, foresight, and collective action can transform villages into models of sustainable progress.

Education and Environment in Harmony

The village Ghuntu, Morbi district, marked a meaningful milestone with the dedication ceremony of the Shah Happiness Foundation Primary School, on Saturday, January 10, 2026. The school provides access to quality education in a safe and inspiring environment, nurturing confidence, discipline, and aspiration among young learners. The launch as the model project of SHAH HAPPINESS FOUNDATION – LIFE Vertical Gardening Initiative at Navnat UK Primary School, Jabalpur, Morbi, under Project 'Life', promotes nutritional improvement, environmental responsibility, and experiential learning, while encouraging urban biodiversity and greenery within school environments. The initiative aims to enhance awareness among students of Shah Happiness Foundation primary schools and 25 primary schools across Morbi district, focusing on the optimal use of land and water resources.

Expression of Gratitude – Ghuntu Ceremony

Sincere gratitude to all dignitaries, guests, and well-wishers who graced the dedication ceremony of the Shah Happiness Foundation Primary School at Ghuntu. Special appreciation was extended to Neerav Doshi, Vice President, MSI Services, Bengaluru, who dedicated the school on behalf of Rika & Manu Shah. Prominent dignitaries including Dr. Dipti McGowan, Chair, Life Global Australia, Suryakant Shah, Rachel Rebecca Thompson, Geoffrey Noel Anson, Charles Ronald Tym, Benjamin & Leo Henderson, Orphan Usman, and Renuka Mehta, UK whose participation reflected global solidarity with rural education and sustainability initiatives.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF GIVING BACK: RIKA & MANU SHAH

The philosophy of “Think Big, Be Bold” of Rika & Manu Shah, reflects a deep and unwavering commitment to long-term, sustainable impact through the transformative initiatives, from rural primary school infrastructure, digital education, women empowerment, preventive healthcare, and community well-being across Morbi and the wider Saurashtra–Kutch region.



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Channeled through the Sarva Mangal Family Trust & Shah Happiness Foundation and Project 'Life', Rajkot, Gujarat, their work is rooted in the belief that prosperity finds true meaning only when it uplifts society. This is not episodic charity, but purposeful institution-building strengthening education systems while extending life-saving healthcare through the Life Blood Centre for economically vulnerable communities, including children affected by Thalassaemia. Driven by Manu Shah's conviction that progress has meaning only when white-collar vision uplifts blue-collar lives, their initiatives strive to ensure opportunity reaches every hand that builds the nation.

To Safeguard School Education & Thalassaemia Prevention Together

Nichi Mandal witnessed a significant milestone with the inauguration of Shah Happiness Foundation – LIFE Thalassaemia Screening & Awareness Programme - 2026, launched as a pilot project along with the dedication of Shah Happiness Foundation Primary School on Tuesday, January 20, 2026. The pilot project aims to ensure that no child is born into preventable lifelong suffering. The initiative marks prevention of deadly disease Thalassaemia, by focusing on awareness, early screening, and community awareness. Designed to be scalable and replicable, the program targets Thalassaemia prevention among marriageable youth across Morbi, Saurashtra and Kutch, with plans to conduct 30,000 screening tests and reach over 300,000 individuals through structured awareness initiatives, laying the foundation for wider regional expansion.

Expression of Gratitude – Nichi Mandal Ceremony

Sincere thanks to all dignitaries and guests who attended the inauguration of the Shah Happiness Foundation – LIFE Thalassaemia Screening & Awareness Programme - 2026 and the dedication of the Shah Happiness Foundation Primary School at Nichi Mandal. Deep appreciation to Lokesh Mehta, Senior Vice President, MSI Services, Bengaluru, for inaugurating the program in virtual presence of Rika & Manu Shah. The presence and encouragement of public representatives including Durlabhjibhai Detharia, MLA, Vanrajsinh Padharia, Joint Secretary, Health Department of Government of Gujarat, along with Morbi-based industrialists, prominent ceramic vendors of MSI Services Khimji Kundaria, Vipul Kundaria, Chandra Kundaria, Paresh Kundaria, Amit Detharia, Urvesh Desai were gratefully acknowledged. Our thanks to Overseas Guests Rupande & Jaymal Ruparell from Canada for attending the ceremony.



Dedication of Shah Happiness Foundation Primary School at Ghuntu | Dedication of Shah Happiness Foundation Primary School at Nichi Mandal | Launch of SHAH HAPPINESS FOUNDATION – LIFE Vertical Gardening Initiative Model Project at Navnat UK Primary School, Jabalpur, Morbi | Inauguration of SHAH HAPPINESS FOUNDATION – LIFE Thalassaemia Screening & Awareness Programme - 2026 | Joined virtually by Manu Shah, Shashikant Koticha and Vanrajsinh Padharia | Attended in person by Lokesh Mehta, Meetal Koticha Shah and Rushikesh Pandya

Life Global USA and Project 'Life', India, extended special gratitude to Rika and Manu Shah of the Shah Happiness Foundation, California (USA), for their sustained commitment to education, environmental stewardship, women's empowerment, and preventive healthcare.

Dr. Parikh also acknowledged the efforts of Bakul Mehta, Patron, Shashikant Koticha, Managing Trustee, Meetal Koticha Shah, Joint Executive Trustee & CEO, and Rushikesh Pandya, CDOO, Project 'Life', for their leadership and coordination.

A STRONG MESSAGE FOR THE FUTURE

“When villages invest in prevention, education, and compassion; they invest in the destiny of the nation.”

The initiatives at Ghuntu and Nichi Mandal remind us that meaningful change begins with intent, integrity, and action at the grassroots. Let these milestones inspire more communities to choose awareness over ignorance, prevention over suffering, and education over limitation, so that every child is born healthy, learns with dignity, and grows with purpose.

Global Head Quarters Saurashtra Medical & Educational Charitable Trust Indian Medical Scientific Research Foundation Ms. Meetal Koticha Shah Mr. Rushikesh Pandya +91 982 428 5868 savelifelife.org www.999life.org		Partner Charities		 Life Global (USA) Mr. Amar Shah +1 201 819 3321 amarshah48@gmail.com		 California Chapter Dr. Bhanji Kundaria +1 805 878 4165 bkundaria@gmail.com www.lifeglobal.us		 Texas Chapter Mr. Dilip Punatar +1 614 440 4239 punatar@hotmail.com		 Life Global UK Ms. Bina Sanghvi +44 780 115 0338 info@lifeglobal.org.uk www.lifeglobal.org.uk		 Life Global Canada Mr. Sunil Koticha +1 204 890 2084 skoticha@gmail.com www.lifeglobal.ca		 Life Global Australia Dr. Dipti McGowan +61 755 510 412 info@lifeglobal.org.au www.lifeglobal.org.au	
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People Like Nirav Shah Ushered Their States Through Covid. Now They Want To Lead Them

By DAN MERICA

Nirav Shah understands that not everyone agrees with how he led the state of Maine through the coronavirus pandemic. And he is happy to admit that he made some mistakes.

That, he argues, is why he should be governor. “I have taken tough questions about covid, and as a result, I am a better leader,” said Shah, a leading Democratic gubernatorial candidate in Maine who ran the state’s Center for Disease Control and Prevention from 2019 to 2023. “If I knew then what I know now, what would I have done differently?” he said. “I think one of the reasons why my candidacy has traction is that I’ve been very open about it.”

Shah is one of a small but growing group of doctors and public health officials who helped helm their states through the coronavirus pandemic and are now either holding or running for office. Their candidacies offer a test for how those involved in the pandemic response discuss their work, how the public feels about the more controversial actions taken in the name of keeping people safe and whether voters will be turned off by memories of the dark period.

Decisions made during the coronavirus pandemic remain notably polarizing, with polls finding one of the only areas of widespread agreement is that the pandemic “did more to drive the country apart than to bring it together.” Democrats and Republicans are divided on support for required vaccinations in response to the pandemic, whether institutions came up short on protecting people and if government officials gave too little consideration to individual choice, according to a 2025 survey by the Pew Research Center.

But those doctors turned candidates argue that they will be judged more as comforters during a crisis than on a set of policies.

The pandemic turned public health officials in these states into overnight statewide celebrities – and, in some cases, villains. Epidemiologists were often the face of their state’s response, holding hours-long briefings that detailed what officials were doing and, for some, providing stability during a particularly unstable time. That phenomenon created a deep reservoir of support, and some antipathy, for these doctors.

The vast majority of candidates associated with the pandemic are Democrats – a reflection of the party’s lean into science in the face of Republican attacks and the rise of vaccine-skeptic Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. While the majority of doctors in Congress are Republicans, like Sens. Rand Paul (Kentucky) and Bill Cassidy (Louisiana), their party has collectively moved against many of the actions that were taken to combat the deadly coronavirus, especially rules about masking in public and prolonged school closures, Democrats’ largest vulnerability around the pandemic.



PHOTO: FACEBOOK @NIRAV SHAH FOR MAINE

Nirav Shah, candidate for Governor of Maine.

“If I knew then what I know now about schools, I would have approached things differently,” Shah said in an interview with *The Washington Post*. While he defended the state’s record on school closures – which were shorter than those in other states – “in hindsight, everything’s easy, but I would have done things differently.”

He also said he should have been clearer in explaining that other guidelines were subject to updating as understanding of the virus shifted. Many voters and some political figures criticized the changing guidance related to masking and quarantines.

“It’s a really interesting test,” said Josh Green, a doctor and the governor of Hawaii, who worked as the state’s covid response point person when he served as lieutenant governor. “There’s no question that regions view the covid response differently, but the real litmus test is whether they perceive the candidate as a caring physician or someone who can connect to their community.”

Green, who won his first term as governor in 2022, credits his role in the pandemic response with his victory. “I ended up bonding with the entire population,” he said. The Democrat is the overwhelming favorite to win reelection later this year.

Amy Acton, the presumptive Democratic nominee for governor in Ohio, represents a unique test of this dynamic.

The former director of the Ohio Department of Health became a hero to some for her work steering the Republican-controlled state through the pandemic. But she also faced charged, personal protests, including by armed men at her home, for her decisions.

“I am very proud of the way we worked in a very non-partisan way,” Acton said.

Some of her decisions were controversial. Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine (R), acting on Acton’s advice, was the first governor to shut down schools statewide, and the state called off its presidential primary in March 2020

mere hours before polls were supposed to open. Acton resigned her public health role in 2020, citing a refusal to sign certain health orders that she feared “would have killed people,” she said in a local TV interview.

Acton has been reticent when asked whether she made any mistakes as she led Ohio through the pandemic, and, in a nod to the politics of her state, which has backed President Donald Trump every time he has been on the ballot, she has said her work was done alongside DeWine.

Republicans, however, are eager to use the response against her.

“It is clearly her number one negative with Republicans, by far. It is what she is known for,” said Shannon Burns, the head of Strongsville GOP, a grassroots Republican organization outside Cleveland. “Quite frankly, she is public enemy number one in the Republican base.”

Where Shah is facing a crowded Democratic primary in a state that has leaned to the left for decades, the politics are more complicated for Acton, said multiple operatives working in Ohio. Acton has a well of support for her high-profile leadership, but she also faces a vocal, motivated opposition that her would-be Republican opponent, Vivek Ramaswamy, could activate.

“There is an enormous swath of Ohioans who have very positive feelings about her and her leadership,” said Aaron Pickrell, a top adviser to Barack Obama’s two successful Ohio campaigns. “That cuts the other way, too. Now people are asking why did we do this, and why did we do that. And they try to make her the face of it.”

Not all operatives agree with this view. Erik Polyak, executive director of 314 Action, a group aimed at helping doctors and scientists seek higher office, said his group is “not seeing a backlash to covid” in either Acton’s or Shah’s campaigns.

“If anything, we think of the positives being they’ve introduced themselves to their states; they’ve led with evidence, facts and compassion; and they’ve saved lives,” said Polyak, whose group has endorsed both candidates.

That has been Shah’s and Acton’s experience from some corners of their states. Both public health officials were turned into bobbleheads during covid. Acton has been seen as a top Democratic recruit in Ohio since she left her public health position. And Shah recalled how a candy store in Freeport, Maine, created the “Shah Bar” to honor his work for the state.

“They know me, they have a bond with me,” he said.

Shah, however, said the negative sentiment about the pandemic response was “definitely a consideration” when he was deciding to run, because he worried “that negative sentiment would be overwhelming such that the other positive messages that I like to talk about around health care and education ... would be drowned out.”

“That remains a risk,” he said, “and anyone who tries to brush that aside is not being honest or real.”

-THE WASHINGTON POST

ICE Database Flags 114 From India And Pakistan As U.S. Intensifies Deportations

By A STAFF WRITER

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has released a public database naming thousands of undocumented immigrants with criminal convictions as part of an intensified federal deportation drive. While the database includes individuals

from dozens of countries, this report focuses specifically on 114 South Asian nationals — 89 from India and 25 from Pakistan — due to its relevance to the South Asian community.

The database, maintained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), identifies individuals arrested for serious offences ranging from sexual assault and drug traf-

ficking to domestic violence, robbery, fraud, and money laundering. DHS has described the list as representing the “worst of the worst” offenders encountered during immigration enforcement operations.

According to DHS, the enforcement actions reflected in the database were carried out under the leadership

-CONTINUED ON PAGE 10



TINA GOYAL & MAPS ENTERTAINMENT



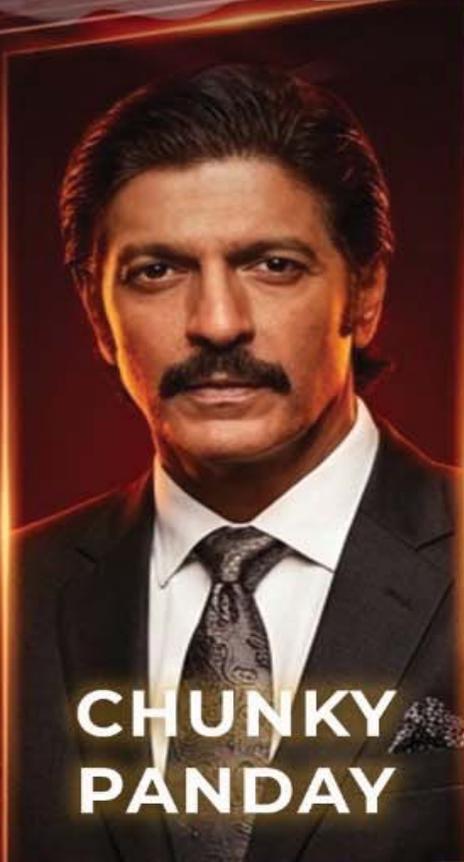
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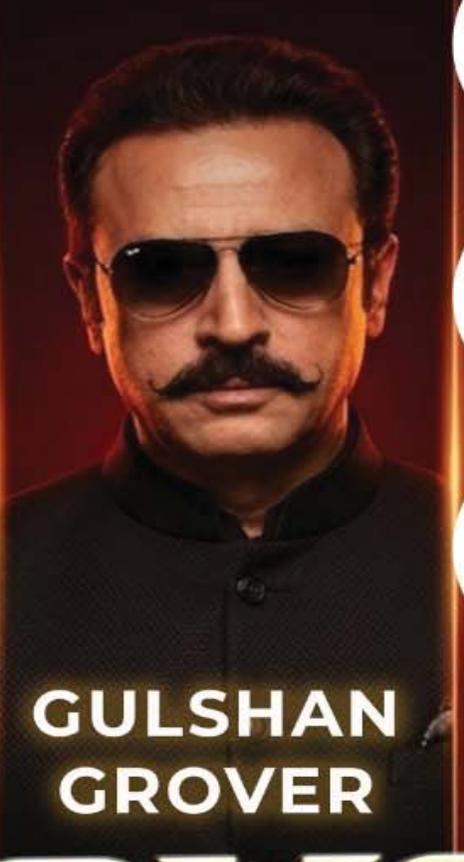
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Multimillion-Dollar Fraud Probe In Maryland Leads To Call Centers In India

By DAN MORSE

When the 58-year-old fraud victim told investigators in Maryland the details of how she had been duped out of \$1.7 million, they knew she was hardly alone.

A year-long, expanding investigation – the results of which were made public Monday – revealed just how widespread her plight was: more than 650 victims, targeted by the same three call centers in India and losing over \$48 million. The fraudsters posed as tech support workers, allowing them to gain access to victims' computers, or described themselves as American law enforcement as part of elaborate ruses.

"A staggering amount of money," said FBI Special Agent in Charge Jimmy Paul, head of the bureau's Baltimore field office. "It's infuriating and it's unfair."

The probe led authorities in India to raid the call centers on Dec. 11 and 12, Paul said. Those operations were "dismantled," according to India's Central Bureau of Investigation, leading to the arrest of six leaders and the seizure of laptops, cellphones, other devices and cash.

Maryland officials said the victims probably will never see their money again.

Investigators this week described how the scams started at the call centers, where workers spent their days looking for American targets through email, text messages, phone calls and computer pop-up warnings.

They often played the role of a tech support worker from, say, Microsoft or Apple, persuading their marks to download software onto their computers. Or they said they were calling from the U.S. Social Security Administration to report that criminals were using the victim's Social Security number for money laundering, drug trafficking or child pornography. "It's always something that sounds horrific," FBI agent Jeremy Capello said.

The terrified victims are often transferred to someone purporting to be from U.S. law enforcement agencies such as the FBI or Drug Enforcement Administration.

"The antennas come down because you think you're talking to a trusted person in the government," said John McCarthy, the top prosecutor in Montgomery County, Maryland. "That's how they suck you into this."

The big goal: convincing the victims that their money wasn't safe in the bank and that it needed to be transferred for safekeeping, to the FBI or DEA or even the U.S. Treasury Department. Soon enough, the target – often an otherwise smart person but fully in the grip of skilled impersonators – is routing money to specific bank ac-



Montgomery County State's Attorney John McCarthy speaks at a news conference on Monday. In the foreground are two victims. On the left is Montgomery County Police Capt. Marc Erme.

counts, purchasing and moving cryptocurrency, buying gold bars for an "agent" of the government to pick up, or sending cash.

"It's all about the art of making people believe you're someone you're not," said Capello, who works in the FBI's Baltimore field office and has investigated white-collar fraud for 16 years.

The first person to reach targets, Capello said, often speaks with a noticeable Indian accent. As the victim talks to more people faking identities – especially the purported American law enforcement officers – the voices tend to become more American-sounding, according to Capello. Sometimes that is how the fraudsters speak, but sometimes they are Americanizing their voice through software and AI, according to Capello.

Another central part of the scam: convincing the victims to keep their money movements secret so as not to attract attention from the criminals who already knew about them.

The 58-year-old reported the fraud to detectives at the Montgomery County Police Department, who had arrested several gold-bar scammers working in Maryland, some with ties to Indian call centers. They had put out the word: Come to us if you have been swindled. By the time the 58-year-old fraud victim had arrived, the Montgomery detectives, working alongside the FBI, were determined to trace the frauds to the call centers overseas.

The woman provided a wealth of data of the people

she was dealing with: bank account numbers, email addresses, phone numbers. "We were off to the races," Capello said.

Investigators worked closely with the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center (IC3), slowly linking the woman's details with others in Maryland and elsewhere in the United States.

The U.S. and Montgomery County investigators were able to present their case to Indian authorities through an FBI agent stationed in Delhi solely tasked with helping to investigate scam call centers in India, according to Capello. Before authorities there could search the call centers, though, they needed sworn statements from at least two U.S. victims, which Capello and the Montgomery detectives were able to provide.

The India raids took place in Noida, Delhi and Kolkata, according to authorities there.

"During the period 2022-2025," India's Central Bureau of Investigation said in a news release, "the accused individuals, operating under pseudonymous identities of US Government officials from Drug Enforcement [Administration], Federal Bureau of Investigation, and Social Security Administration, conspired to target US victims by threatening them that their Social Security Numbers had been used for money laundering and drug deliveries."

The Indian call centers used in frauds, Capello said, sell each other lists of potential American targets with phone numbers and email addresses. And they work in highly competitive operations, with quotas posted on the walls, he said.

The fraudsters present themselves as concerned, diligent government agents, but their power and intimidation is never far from the surface. And they're not scared to bring it the fore, Capello said, recalling how one victim – balking at their demands – suddenly received an email with what looked like a genuine American arrest warrant and a threat that he would be locked up if he did not follow orders.

The message, in no uncertain terms, was this: "How do we know you're not involved in this too?"

"These scams exploit fear, trust and vulnerability. They are deeply personal crimes," Montgomery County Police Captain Marc Erme said.

Capello said it remains very difficult to recover any of the money. But he feels like their work – dismantling the three call centers – will help prevent more scams.

"We're making an impact," he said. "We're chipping away at it."

-THE WASHINGTON POST

ICE Database Flags 114 From India And Pakistan As U.S. Intensifies Deportations

-CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

of Secretary Kristi Noem and are consistent with President Donald Trump's stated priority of removing undocumented immigrants with criminal convictions from the United States. The database is publicly accessible through the department's "Worst of the Worst" portal.

DHS recently expanded the portal by adding 5,000 new profiles, bringing the total number of individuals listed to 25,000. The department emphasized that the database is a "snapshot" of arrests made by ICE and CBP and does not represent the entire undocumented immigrant population.

"We are not stopping until every single one of these individuals is removed," DHS said in a statement, adding that the public release is intended

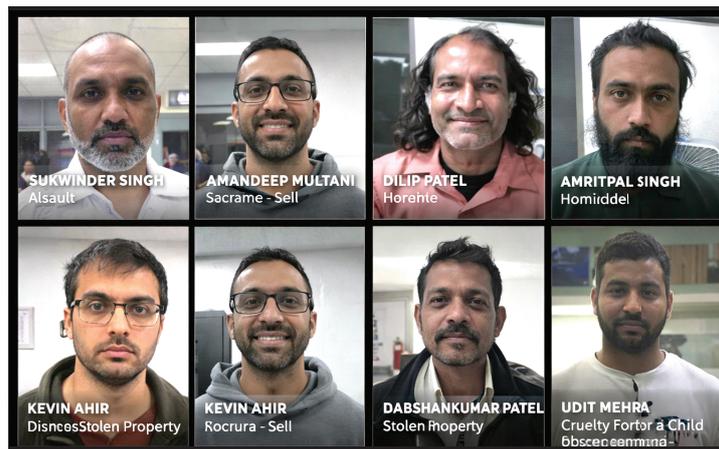


PHOTO: COURTESY: DHS

to provide transparency into federal immigration enforcement. "Americans should not be victimized by individuals who are not legally authorized to be in our country."

The announcement comes at a time of heightened debate over immigration enforcement following recent ICE operations in Minneapolis that drew criticism after coinciding with the deaths of two U.S. citizens, Renee Good and Alex Pretti. Despite the controversy, DHS said its focus remains on individuals it characterizes as violent or repeat offenders who are in the country illegally.

DHS officials said the database will continue to be updated as enforcement efforts expand nationwide, underscoring the administration's broader strategy of prioritizing removals based on criminal history rather than nationality.



Shorts

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India-Israel-U.S. Friendship Highlighted At FIA-Chicago's 77th Republic Day Celebration

BY A STAFF WRITER

FIA-Chicago (est. 1980) celebrated the 77th Republic Day of Bharat (India) commemorating the adoption of India's Constitution in 1950. The event falls on January 26 every year.

More than 340 people attended the event and many described the program as historic, a press release from organizers said.

"The celebration, held at Haridham Swaminarayana Mandir in Schaumburg, Illinois, reflected the Indian diaspora's enduring bond with the motherland, blending tradition with contemporary expressions of national pride," the FIA Chicago-1980 press release said.

Among the attendees was Consul General of India Somnath Ghose; Honorable Consul General of Israel Elad Strohmayer and his staff; FIA Trustee Director Dr. Bharat Barai; Trustees Kanti Patel and Raj Patel; Executives Anil Singh, Joy (Dipen) Shah, and Amar Upadhyay; Haribhai from Bhartiya Senior center; Sanjay Vora, president of FLEXTRON; Harish Kolasani from India Hub; Krishna and Meghna Bansal from ICO; Vinesh Virani, President of VHP-A Chicago; Vandana Jhingan from TV-Asia; Dipali Sawant, President of Maratha Mandal; Chetan Rege from Hindu Swayam Sewak Sangh, Gurmeet Singh, President of Punjabi Association; Ravindra Kumar Jha, CEO of SBI Chicago branch; Naresh Shah, President of Senior Club, Rameshbhai Choksi, President of Senior Center; Rajendra Thakkar from Jalaram Mandir, Sandeep Patel from ISCON, Devesh Pandit from Hindu Swayam Sewak Sangh; Pramod Joshi, Fine arts commissioner of Skokie; Smitesh Shah from MAFS/UMAS; Avatanas Kumar from INDIC; Sanjay Shah from Jain Center, Volunteers Manish Patel from ShreeSanatan EcoSystem, Nitin Surti from VHPA, emcee Nimisha Patel from VHP-a, Hashmukh Patel from OF-BJP; Neelam Singh and Arunima Singh from Karni Sena; Deputy Consul General of Israel Delphine and Jack; Anna, and other Jewish friends; and many community leaders graced the event from start to finish.

Sunil Shah, chairman of the other FIA, attended the event with his team, sending a strong message that organizations can maintain their identity while co-existing in unity, the press release said.

The program began with a moment of silence to honor Bangladeshi Hindu victims of targeted attacks on religious minorities. A cultural presentation marked the 150th anniversary of Vande Mataram, the iconic patriotic song.

Speaking on the occasion, Consul General Ghosh highlighted India's progress in economic and entrepreneurial development, as well as in science and technology. He also noted the civiliza-



PHOTO: FIA CHICAGO-1980.

Organizers and special guests at India's 77th Republic Day celebration event held in Chicago Feb. 7, 2026, hosted by FIA Chicago-1980.

tional similarities between India and Israel, describing both nations as enduring beacons of democracy in a challenging neighborhood.

Consul General Strohmayer said India and Israel share a strong and enduring friendship. He emphasized that the civilizational bond between the two nations spans millennia, rooted in shared values of resilience, pluralism, and the pursuit of knowledge.

Hindus in Pakistan and Bangladesh, and condemned terrorism carried out in the name of Islamic Jihad.

Hemant Patel, President of FIA, emphasized the strong friendship between Israel, India, and the United States, calling it the need of the hour to collectively combat religious extremism. He shared reflections from his recent visit to Israel as part of an Indian-American delegation. In an emotional message, he said

Pakistan, and other parts of the world. He urged the global community to examine the root causes of terrorism/extremism and act decisively.

He also praised the Constitution of Bharat and expressed support for moving toward a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) — one nation under one law.

Organizers dwelt on the 150th anniversary of Vande Mataram, which was written in Sanskrit and portrays India as a loving mother; a song that inspired freedom fighters during British rule. Yash Desai rendered a soulful Vande Mataram, Darshana Patel sang Ae Mere Watan Ke Logon. Divya Prakashini of Divya Nritya Kuchipudi performed a dance to both songs. "In pin-drop silence, the audience was immersed in deep patriotic emotion, with many moved to tears," organizers said. Mihir Acharya also gave stirring renditions of patriotic songs.

FIA also showcased highlights from the 2026 Republic Day celebration in the capital, New Delhi, along with milestones from its 45-year journey.

"A major highlight was the presence of the Consul General of Israel — a historic moment in FIA's 45-year history. His participation conveyed a strong message to both communities about the importance of friendship between India, Israel, and the United States in fostering peace in the world," FIA Chicago-1980 said in the press release.

Executive Vice President Anil Singh delivered the vote of thanks. The annual souvenir featuring sponsors' advertisements was broadcast on the big screen. President Hemant Patel urged the diaspora to participate in the upcoming Independence Day celebrations on July 4 and August 15.



A section of the audience at the Feb. 7, 2026, Republic Day of India event in Chicago, hosted by FIA Chicago-1980.

Dr. Bharat Barai, Pravasi Bhartiya Samman awardee and FIA Trustee Director, spoke on India's freedom struggle and the adoption of the Constitution. He warned the diaspora about the challenges in India and Israel's neighborhood, highlighted atrocities against

he was deeply moved at the site near the Gaza border where approximately 1,200 to 1,400 innocent Israelis were killed and burnt alive on October 7, 2023. He noted that such atrocities are not new to the world, recalling similar tragedies witnessed in India, Sydney, Bangladesh,

ASTROLOGY



This week for you

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

ARIES: This week, you may sense limited backing which can shake your motivation. Adjustments or changes may not go as smoothly as expected. Overthinking can drain your strength Support from a close friend proves helpful. Setting goals beyond reach may lead to dissatisfaction, making realistic planning necessary. An unexpected decision could alter the outcome of an important issue, so adaptability will work.

TAURUS: Household concerns may weigh on your mind and subtly affect your mood. Money given out might not return on schedule, requiring adjustments. Arranging necessary tools could take extra effort. Careless remarks about others may create problems. Trying to influence opinions against someone may not yield desired results. Sudden shifts in loyalty within your circle could come as a surprise.

GEMINI: Progress in studies brings a sense of relief as things start aligning steadily. Financial conditions show improvement. Continued effort helps you secure a desirable assignment or responsibility. Emotional bonds deepen. Showing interest in matters that are not your concern may invite unnecessary complications. Concentrating on personal priorities allows you to maintain inner peace and stability.

CANCER: Professional duties may extend beyond regular hours. Careful attention during studies helps prevent mistakes and enhances performance. Addressing a financial misstep promptly saves you from future discomfort. Emotional gaps in relationships begin to close through open communication. Maintaining daily routines supports steady health. Depending on others to manage savings may reflect poorly, making self-management a better option.

LEO: Your initiative and drive earn recognition from senior figures, strengthening your professional image. Decisions related to property show favourable returns, particularly for sellers. Ignoring meals may affect health, so balance is necessary. Focused attention in academics is required to meet expectations. Successfully completing a major responsibility enhances confidence. You may receive an invitation to an exclusive or high-profile event this week.

VIRGO: Family encouragement boosts confidence and influences academic efforts. Those involved in real estate may benefit from opportunities. A commitment to fitness supports better health choices. Time spent apart strengthens bonding between partners. Spiritual interests offer mental peace and clarity. Making last-minute changes at work may not help, so following the original strategy is advisable.

LIBRA: Pending plans begin moving forward as administrative hurdles reduce. A thoughtful gesture for your partner adds warmth. Sticking to a disciplined routine improves overall well-being. Some individuals may choose to start a new course or skill-based programme. Relying on assumptions while studying could lead to errors. A change of surroundings brings refreshing moments and experiences.

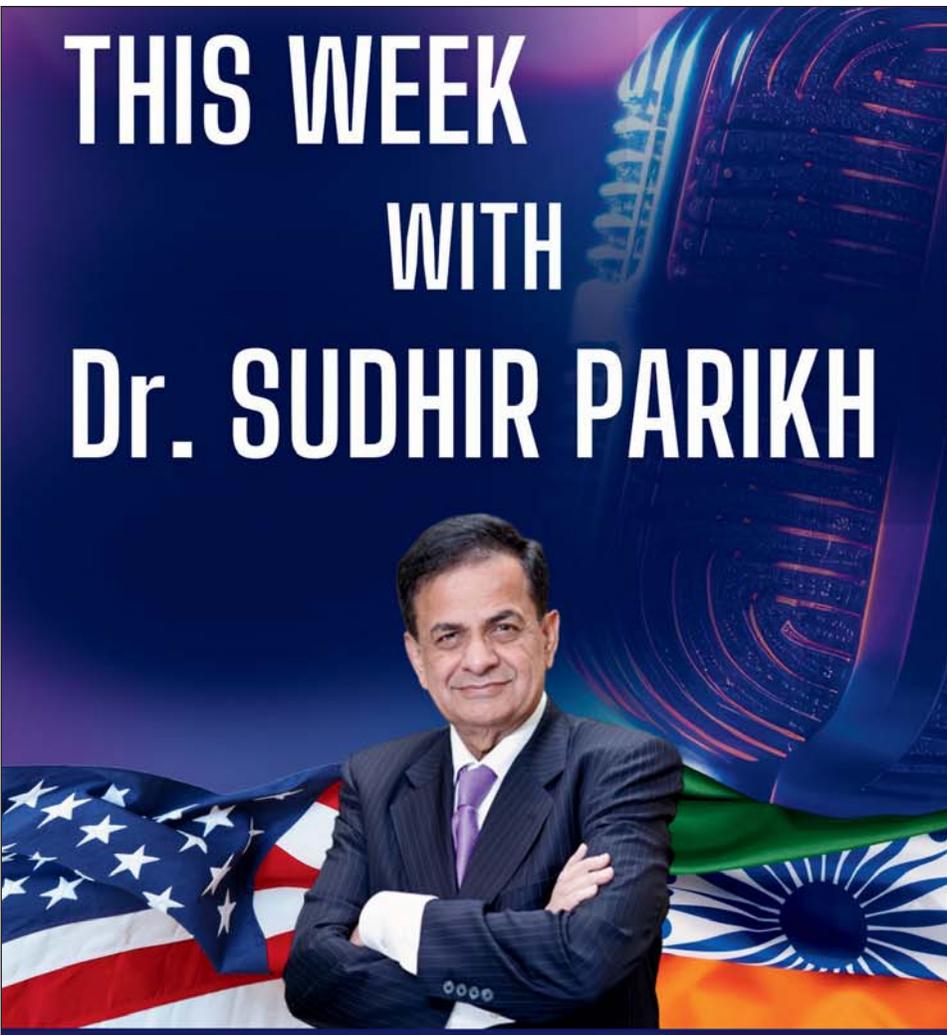
SCORPIO: Spending meaningful time with loved ones lifts your spirits. Singles may encounter someone who brings emotional fulfillment. Creative professionals could see an increase in workload, requiring strong concentration. Improvement in an elder's health offers comfort. Your expectations motivate others to put in effort. Financial matters remain favourable, with opportunities for investments.

SAGITTARIUS: A shift in career direction brings better income prospects. Research-oriented individuals may successfully explore innovative ideas. Family gatherings create emotional closeness. Adopting healthier habits supports physical well-being. Students and trainees gain recognition through dedication. Even if academic motivation fluctuates, thorough preparation keeps progress steady.

CAPRICORN: Your dedication at work earns appreciation and positive feedback from seniors. Academic challenges feel easier with encouragement from friends. Newly married couples may think about setting up a separate household. Revisiting old memories with someone close brings emotional comfort. Financial growth shows encouraging signs. Career demands stay high, keeping you actively engaged throughout the week.

AQUARIUS: A long-awaited luxury purchase may become possible due to an unexpected offer. Overindulgence in food or drinks could affect health, making moderation important. Social activities related to sports may introduce a compatible connection. Engineering professionals experience steady advancement in their field. When new opportunities arise, quick decisions prove beneficial, as timing plays a crucial role.

PISCES: Those handling demanding responsibilities achieve success through confidence and determination. Organising a function earns appreciation for leadership skills. Employed individuals may notice an increase in financial benefits. Paying close attention to health helps maintain balance. Pressure s requires firm and independent choices. Offering guidance strengthens understanding and mutual respect.



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Several Indian American Scientists Comment On Newly Uncovered Clue Explaining Why Kidney Disease Carries High Risk Of Heart Failure

By ALLYSON CHIU

For years, scientists have been working to unravel the mystery of patients with failing kidneys dying from heart-related complications.

Researchers now say they've uncovered a clue that explains why people with chronic kidney disease have such a high risk of heart failure – and it could have major implications for the diagnosis and treatment of the two common health conditions.

A new study found that diseased kidneys released tiny particles that were toxic to the heart, according to findings published recently in the peer-reviewed journal *Circulation*.

"We went on a mission to understand this interorgan communication between the kidney and the heart," said Uta Erdbrügger, an associate professor of medicine at the University of Virginia School of Medicine who co-authored the study. "We found that there are molecules communicating between the kidney and the heart."

That molecular discovery is helping to shed light on one way the kidney and heart are linked – and, in this case, to dangerous effect, said Susmita Sahoo, the study's senior author and an associate professor of medicine at the Cardiovascular Research Institute at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai.

"No one has shown this causal relationship before," Sahoo said.

THE KIDNEY-HEART CONNECTION

The relationship between chronic kidney disease and heart conditions is well documented. Studies show that the severity of cardiovascular complications is correlated with the stage of kidney failure. Some estimates suggest that more than half of people with advanced kidney disease develop cardiovascular problems.

"Heart failure and kidney disease are very, very closely intertwined conditions," said Janani Rangaswami, a nephrologist and professor of medicine at the George Washington University School of Medicine who was not involved in the study. "Almost 1 in 2 individuals with heart failure will have some degree of kidney dysfunction, and kidney disease is a very powerful risk enhancer for the development of heart failure."

Kidney failure causes bodies to retain fluid, which can put more strain on the heart muscle, said Samir Parikh, president of the American Society of Nephrology. Kidney disease can also cause electrolyte imbalances, which can lead to dangerous heart rhythms, he said. The condition is also associated with accelerated hardening of arteries that can result in heart attacks.

"Each step that you lose kidney function is just a greater and greater stress on the heart," Parikh said. "The kidney really has this profound influence on the



PHOTO: DREAMSTIME/STOCK PHOTO



PHOTO: @SN-ONLINE.ORG

Dr. Samir Parikh, president of the American Society of Nephrology.



PHOTO: @LABS.ICAHN.MSSM.EDU

Dr. Susmita Sahoo, The Sahoo Lab of Cardiovascular Epitranscriptomics and Exosomes.



PHOTO: LINKEDIN @JANANI-RANGASWAMI

Janani Rangaswami, chief of Nephrology, George Washington University.

health of the heart in all of its dimensions."

The correlation between kidney and heart problems can also trace to shared risk factors, such as hypertension, smoking and diabetes. But the study's author said that hypothesis can't fully explain why kidney patients are more likely to also have heart failure.

STUDYING THE LINK

In search of answers, the researchers homed in on microscopic liquid-filled sacs that are produced by almost all cells and serve as messengers in the body. Known as extracellular vesicles, the particles shuttle proteins and other materials between cells and organs.

The scientists collected blood samples from about 50 people, including those with varying degrees of kidney disease as well as healthy subjects. They observed that the blood from sick people contained vesicles carrying a type of noncoding RNA, the genetic material that orchestrates basic life activities, that had a toxic effect on heart tissue. They noted these harmful vesicles were being produced by the damaged kidneys and were not found in blood samples from healthy patients.

In early lab tests using mice, the researchers discovered that reducing extracellular vesicles in the blood using a drug led to improved heart function and fewer signs of heart failure even in mice with diseased kidneys.

CHANGING CARE

Rangaswami said the study was "very scientifically

rigorous" and addressed a scientific gap in understanding kidney-specific factors harming the heart.

"That's a very poorly understood area in this whole nexus of heart-kidney disease," she said.

Sahoo said her team's findings could help identify heart disease in kidney patients earlier, before they show symptoms.

"By measuring these cardiotoxic microRNAs, you can actually predict or identify or diagnose the patient who are on the way to developing a failing heart," she said.

The research can also influence treatment recommendations, said Erdbrügger, the study co-author who is also a practicing kidney doctor. For instance, Erdbrügger said if she knew one of her kidney patients had a higher risk of heart disease, she would consider treating more aggressively by increasing drug dosages or using more combinations of medications.

"We are really going towards precision medicine," she said. "The better we understand the pathophysiology or the mechanisms, the better we can intervene and develop a new drug."

But she and other experts cautioned that more research is needed.

"These are potential biomarkers and potential therapeutic targets," said Joseph Vassalotti, chief medical officer of the National Kidney Foundation, who was not involved in the study. "This is all preliminary, and there's a lot of additional work

that would need to be done to validate these findings, and to see if they apply diagnostically and therapeutically."

Erdbrügger said scientists are working on a much larger, longer-term study to track whether people with chronic kidney disease develop heart conditions.

Erdbrügger said scientists are working on a much larger, longer-term study to track whether people with chronic kidney disease develop heart conditions.

KNOW YOUR RISK

In the meantime, experts urge people to stay on top of monitoring their kidney health.

It's critical to know your chances of developing kidney disease, Parikh said. He added that simple blood and urine tests can diagnose the condition.

Some risk factors include:

- Diabetes
- High blood pressure
- A family history of kidney disease or failure
- For women, adverse pregnancy conditions such as gestational diabetes and preeclampsia

If you have any of those risk factors, Rangaswami recommended talking to a clinician about monitoring your kidney health.

"When we think about kidney health, we have to understand that preserving kidney health is so important to preserving heart health," Rangaswami said. "We have so many amazing therapies that can really stabilize kidney function."

-THE WASHINGTON POST

BAPS Sets Guinness World Record For 'Largest Simultaneous Hindu Text Recital'

By A Staff Writer

BAPS, a global spiritual organization celebrated its leader Mahant Swami Maharaj's birthday February 2, 2026, by setting a world record recognized by Guinness.

As more than 200,000 devotees from around the world celebrated the birthday, a record was set when 12,723 children gathered to recite the Satsang Diksha, a sacred Sanskrit scripture composed by Mahant Swami Maharaj. The recitation was officially recognized by Guinness World Records as the highest number of children simultaneously reciting Sanskrit verses. A Certificate of Recognition was formally presented to Mahant Swami Maharaj during the celebration. (See the video of the event at baps.sl/worldrecord)

A total of 15,666 children between the ages of 3 and 13 completed the full memorization and recitation of the Satsang Diksha within one year. Out of these, 12,723 children participated in the live recitation at Vadodara, Gujarat, fulfilling the criteria set by Guinness World Records, a press release from BAPS said. Children participating in the record included hundreds from the United States and Canada, reflecting the global reach of BAPS and the growing interest among Indian American families in traditional learning, the organization said.

The Satsang Diksha consists of 315 Sanskrit shlokas and offers practical guidance for spiritual growth, moral conduct, social harmony, and disciplined living.

Guinness World Records officials traveled from England to personally verify and confirm the achievement. Following a thorough review process, the officials formally declared the recital as a world record, honoring the children's dedication and the collective effort behind the initiative.

Although the event took place in India, its impact resonated with Indian American communities.

Parents described the experience as a meaningful alternative to screen-heavy routines common in modern education. In contrast to classrooms where students often shift between devices and notifications, the Sanskrit recitation required focus, memorization, discipline, and sustained effort over several months, BAPS noted.

Param Patel, a participant from Edison, New Jersey, said it took months of consistent practice. "At first I thought it was too hard," he said. "But once I finished, I felt more confident. It showed me I can stick with something."

Six-year-old Anadi Tailor from Atlanta said memorizing the verses helped her apply values in everyday life. "I remember the words when I am at school," she said. "They help me make good choices."

Another participant, Vani Patel from Los Angeles, described the emotional impact of reciting with



Thousands of children recited the text of the Satsang Diksha Feb. 2, 2026, at the birthday celebration of BAPS spiritual leader Mahant Swami Maharaj, in Ahmedabad.



BAPS Mahant Swami Maharaj receiving the Guinness World Record certification, Feb. 2, 2026.



Photo of the Guinness World Record certification.

thousands of children. "It felt powerful to say the words together," she said.

Sanskrit, one of the world's oldest recorded languages, is known for its precise grammar and deep philosophical tradition. Scholars continue to study it for its linguistic structure. BAPS said organizers carefully selected participants based on their accuracy, commitment, and sincerity, to ensure the recital's quality and authenticity.

Beyond the record-setting event, the celebration

to all the gurus. The sadhus, volunteers, and parents have worked with great dedication—this recognition belongs to them," Mahant Swami Maharaj said.

The event was attended by the Chief Minister of Gujarat Bhupendra Patel, and Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh Mohan Yadav, as special guests. A letter of greetings from the Union Minister for Home Affairs and Cooperation Amit Shah, was also read out on the occasion.

featured cultural presentations with hundreds of performers, immersive video segments, and inspiring addresses. During the event, Mahant Swami Maharaj inaugurated a Mobile School initiative for tribal regions under the theme "Har Ghar Shiksha Ki Jyot Jale," to highlight BAPS' commitment to education and social upliftment.

"The honor received from Guinness World Records today is the result of the children's sincere and tireless efforts, and it is dedicated



Photo: Dreamstime

ABC's of H-1Bs: How Much Must Employers Pay—and Why Prevailing Wage Matters More Than Ever (Part 2 of 7)

IN MEMORIAM

By David H. Nachman, Esq



Michael Phulwani



David Nachman



Ludka Zimovcak



Snehal Batra

Employers seeking to hire foreign professionals under the H-1B program must meet strict wage requirements, which are now more important than ever under the new H-1B cap selection system. Before filing an H-1B petition, employers must first obtain an approved Labor Condition Application (LCA) from the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL).

Through the LCA, employers attest that they will pay the H-1B worker the higher of: (1) the actual wage paid to similarly employed workers within the company, or (2) the prevailing wage for the occupation in the area of intended employment. If the prevailing wage applies, the employer must pay 100% of that wage, not a reduced amount.

The prevailing wage is determined at the time the LCA is filed and must be based on the best available information. Failure to pay the required wage may expose an employer to liability for back wages, penalties, and government enforcement actions.

In some cases, the prevailing wage may be set by a Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA). If no CBA applies, employers typically rely on the Department of Labor's Occupational Employment Statistics (OES) wage data unless they choose to submit an independent wage survey.

Although employers are not required to maintain formal job descriptions, they must keep documentation supporting how the prevailing wage was determined. These records may need to be produced to the DOL or made available to the public upon request. If documentation is missing or insufficient, the DOL may independently determine the prevailing wage and use that figure to assess compliance and calculate back wages.

Wage level selection depends on several factors, including job duties, required education, experience, and the geographic worksite. Level I wages apply to true entry-level roles with routine duties and limited judgment. Level II wages reflect qualified employees with a solid understanding of the occupation. Level III and IV wages apply to experienced or senior-level roles requiring advanced skills, leadership, or supervisory responsibilities.

Employers should be cautious when assigning wage levels. Positions requiring advanced degrees, specialized experience, or enhanced responsibilities generally should not be classified at the lowest wage level, even if labeled "entry-level."

Why Wage Levels Matter More Under the New H-1B Selection System

Beginning with the FY 2027 H-1B cap season, USCIS will implement a weighted lottery system that favors higher-paying positions.

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While the lottery remains in place, registrations associated with higher wage levels may receive greater selection weight.

As a result, prevailing wage determinations now affect not only compliance but also selection odds. Artificially lowering wage levels or misclassifying positions may reduce the likelihood of selection and increase compliance risk.

Employers preparing for upcoming H-1B seasons should carefully evaluate job duties, experience requirements, and worksite locations before registration. Early planning and coordination with immigration counsel are essential to ensure both compliance and competitiveness in an increasingly selective H-1B process.

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.

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Sunil Thapa Passes Away At 68: Nepal Bids Final Farewell To Its Iconic Villain

Nepal bid farewell to Sunil Thapa on Sunday, the veteran actor who re-shaped villainy in Nepali cinema and was regarded as the greatest villain of all time.

The actor, who began his career in Bollywood and later contributed significantly to Nepali cinema, passed away on Saturday morning in Kathmandu. The actor was 68.

On Sunday, hundreds of his fellow actors, as well as those who worked alongside him, stood in line at the Film Development Board to pay their last respects. Members of the film fraternity were also seen at the Pashupatinath Crematorium late Sunday afternoon, where Thapa was given his final farewell.

Two sitting Nepali ministers arrived at the crematorium, located next to the sacred Bagmati River and beneath the Pashupatinath Temple, where they draped Thapa's body with the national flag.

A postmortem was performed earlier in the morning at the family's request. At Pashupatinath, his son, Anmol, performed the rituals alongside Thapa's wife, Rajani Limbu, and their daughter. Except for Thapa, the rest of his family members live in Mumbai, India.

Thapa had been actively involved in both Nepali and Indian cinema for decades, and his untimely death has left the entire Nepali arts and film fraternity in shock. He was widely respected for bringing depth, recognition, and dignity to antagonistic roles in Nepali films, earning acclaim comparable to that of lead actors.

He was especially popular for his iconic role as 'Rate Kaila,' which became one of the most memorable villains in Nepali cinema. Through his strong screen presence and distinctive acting style, Thapa carved out a unique place for himself in the film industry.

Thapa's career wasn't confined to Nepal alone. In addition to his work in Nepali cinema, he earned recognition in Indian films and television series, where his perfor-



PHOTO: ANI

mances won him audiences across borders.

Born on May 19, 1957, Thapa contributed to acting, modeling, sports, and various aspects of the film industry. He began his professional life as a model, working in Mumbai in the 1970s for prominent brands, including Binny and Mafatlals. In those early years, he also played competitive football, representing ICL Club Bombay and Orkay Sports Club.

While modeling, he worked as a photojournalist for Junior Statesman magazine and covered Bhutan's 1974 coronation ceremony.

He made his Bollywood debut in 1981 with the Hindi film 'Ek Duuje Ke Liye,' a major commercial success that introduced him to Indian audiences. He later returned to Nepal and rose to prominence with the release of Chino, a landmark Nepali film that secured his place in the country's cinematic history.

It was Chino that transformed him into a household name. His portrayal of the antagonist "Ratey Kaila" was both unsettling and magnetic, earning acclaim from critics and audiences alike. The character became so iconic

that Thapa was often recognized more by the role's name than his own.

Though he became synonymous with villainous roles, Thapa resisted being typecast. He portrayed antagonists not as exaggerated figures of evil, but as intelligent, psychologically complex individuals shaped by power, pride, and circumstance. His performances lent villains credibility and depth, altering how conflict was portrayed in Nepali cinema.

In 2014, he appeared as a boxing coach in the Bollywood film Mary Kom, starring Priyanka Chopra. The role earned him a Filmfare Award nomination and further established his reputation in Indian cinema.

Taking to her Instagram, Priyanka Chopra remembered her time with the late actor Sunil Thapa during the shoot of Mary Kom, where Thapa played the role of Priyanka's coach.

She wrote, "You will always be my Coach, Sir. You kept me together when I had just lost my dad. You loved me and helped me through many tough days without even realizing. Your warm hugs and your laugh will always be part of my memories. Gone too young but never forgotten. Thank you for your kindness at a time when I was broken. Rest in peace, Sunil Thapa. My condolences and prayers are with the family and loved ones."

Over the decades, "Rate Kaila," the evergreen villain of Nepali cinema, appeared in more than 138 Nepali films, beginning with Masal in 1985. His most recent release was Eklo, while Ram Naam Satya remains his final completed film. Another film, Pahad, directed by Tulsi Ghimire, is awaiting release.

Thapa passed away while undergoing treatment at the Norvic Hospital in Kathmandu. According to the hospital, he was brought in unconscious, and after an ECG, doctors confirmed his death.

-ANI

Kennedy Trailer: Rahul Bhat Wreaks Havoc As A Cold-Blooded Hitman

The trailer for Anurag Kashyap's directorial 'Kennedy' was released on Sunday, offering a dark and gritty glimpse into the world of its lead character.

The film stars Rahul Bhat and Sunny Leone in key roles and is scheduled to stream on Zee5 from February 20, 2026.

The two-minute trailer introduces Rahul Bhat as Uday Shetty, also known as "Kennedy." In a voiceover, the character says, "My name is Uday Shetty. In the last six years, I have killed so many people that I have lost count." By day, he works as a taxi driver. By night, he becomes a hired killer for the commissioner. Living a double life, he is always looking over his shoulder.

As the narrative progresses, a chance encounter with Sunny Leone's character alters the course of Kennedy's life, drawing her into his violent world and complicating his quest for redemption.

Take a look at the trailer

Just a couple of days ago, Anurag Kashyap announced the film's OTT release on social media. Sharing a post on Instagram, the filmmaker described Kennedy as a "labour of love" and expressed gratitude to his team and

collaborators.

He wrote, "Finally, our labor of love, angst, and everything in between—Kennedy—is coming home after traveling the world on @zee5. All I can say is that I am grateful for having been able to make this film, for my team, my producers, my studio, and at the end of the day—jab jab jo jo hona hai, tab tab so so hota hai (everything happens in its own time)."

'Kennedy' is a dark thriller that revolves around an insomniac former police officer who was thought to be dead. He still works within a corrupt system and secretly searches for a way to fix his wrongs.

The film had its world premiere at the Cannes Film Festival in the Midnight Screenings section and later travelled to several international film festivals, including those held in Sydney, Bucheon, Neuchatel, Lisbon, Austin, Melbourne, London, Mumbai, and Kolkata.

The film is produced by Good Bad Films. Along with Rahul Bhat and Sunny Leone, it also stars Mohit Takalkar, Abhilash Thapliyal, and Megha Burman.

-ANI



Bloomberg, The Washington Post

By Shirley Zhao and Balázs Penz

Swim Club Offers Surprising Cocktails With Spectacular Views of Hong Kong

Perched on the 50th floor rooftop of the new Kimpton hotel, Swim Club serves solid cocktails and delicious enough food. But it's the nostalgic Hollywood glamor and the million-dollar view of the city's iconic skyline along Victoria Harbour that make the bar unique.

The name invokes Southern California's poolside clubs while also nodding to the location's history. The luxury brand's first Hong Kong branch - and its largest globally - sits on the site of the old Mariners' Club in Tsim Sha Tsui, built in 1967. The redevelopment that started in 2018 wasn't exactly a smooth journey. The building went up in flames in March 2023, and it took nine hours to put out the fire. Fortunately, no casualties were reported.

Besides a wide range of original cocktails that offer more clever, modern twists, the bartender also whips up some very decent off-the-menu classics. We asked for a mezcal margarita, with the smokiness of the mezcal adding more complexity to the sweet and sour tones of the margarita.

As a hat tip to the vibe, we also ordered a vesper - James Bond's drink of choice - which was smooth, as it should be. Although the house vodka (Absolut) and the gin (Beefeater) are both mass-market brands, the drink tasted of quality, which showed the bartender's skills.

The food was tasty, if nothing groundbreaking.

The raw tacos featured wagyu beef tartare, which was soft but still retained a nice bite. The sauce was tangy and pleasantly spicy. The BBQ octopus was well-charred and smoky, with a refreshing sauce incorporating onion, tomato and shiso leaves.

I visited with two guests on a Saturday evening. Our bill came at HK\$2,642.2 (\$339) for eight drinks and six plates of decent-sized snacks that were enough to fill us up. The staff was kind and eager to help, even though it sometimes took a while to get someone's attention when the bar was busy. If you are keen on having cocktail-specific exchanges, it's best to go to the bartender directly.

The vibe: It was warm, lively and casual. Led by Heidi Chan of Steve Leung Design Group, the interior incorporates American swimming pool elements and symmetrical patterns, featuring terracotta flooring, blue mosaic tiles, wavy ceiling and softly glowing round lights. The main dining room is centered around a circular bar, crowned by an overhead structure that resembles a massive vintage parasol. The indoor and outdoor areas are separated by a wall of glass folding doors, creating a seamless transition.

Who's next to you: Most guests were young and trendy, some dressed in smart casual clothes going for more glamor. Be prepared to be surrounded by selfie-takers.

Can you conduct a meeting here? It's not ideal. The music got pretty loud, and the guests were a lively, sociable bunch. But if you are with a group looking for some privacy, you can book the secret lounge - available with a minimum spend of HK\$10,000. Its entrance is hidden behind a giant vending machine, revealed upon pressing the "Out of Service" button. The cozy room can probably fit about 10 people.

What we'd order again: Opinions were divided over the Pike, a dirty martini jazzed up with dill and pickles. The bar staff warned us about the strong taste, and it lived up to expectations. I loved it, but the taste of the alcohol didn't come through with the overpowering pickle flavor. It left a lasting impression, and I would certainly go for it again. The Tuck, a whiskey cocktail with a banana twist, won unanimous approval. Although it sounded a bit unusual, the flavor of the banana worked well with the bitter and sweet notes. Most of the cocktails on the menu were easy to drink with the intention to appeal to popular taste. For serious drinkers, order the classics you prefer - they are actually cheaper (HK\$158) than the bar's original creations (HK\$168).

Need to know: It's best to make a reservation for the bar; a couple of days ahead should suffice. Sadly, you can't use the outdoor infinity pool if you are not staying in the hotel. But there's nothing stopping you from having a stroll alongside it, taking in the view of the harbor.

Mind you - it could get a bit windy and chilly on a winter day. Swim Club is on the 50th floor of Kimpton at 11 Middle Road in Tsim Sha Tsui. It opens from 5 p.m. until 1 a.m. on Fridays and Saturdays, and from 5 p.m. to midnight the rest of the week. Reservations can be made online or by phone at +852 3919 6868.

This was originally published in Hong Kong Edition, a weekly newsletter. To subscribe for free, [click here](#).

To read more on Hong Kong bars, check out our reviews of Peridot in The Henderson, the relaxed Aussie wine bar Bourke's and the world champion, Bar Leone.



All Photos by: Shirley Zhao



Cricket – Suryakumar Leads From Front As India Down US In T20 World Cup



Cricket – ICC Men’s T20 World Cup 2026 – Group A – India v United States – Wankhede Stadium, Mumbai, India – February 7, 2026 India’s Suryakumar Yadav celebrates after reaching his half century.



Cricket – ICC Men’s T20 World Cup 2026 – Group A – India v United States – Wankhede Stadium, Mumbai, India – February 7, 2026 India’s Mohammed Siraj celebrates with teammates after dismissing Saiteja Mukkamalla of the U.S.

India captain Suryakumar Yadav led by example as the tournament co-hosts began their Twenty20 World Cup title defence with a scratchy 29-run victory over the United States in a group A contest on Saturday.

India recovered from 77-6 to post a decent 161-9 with Suryakumar hitting a scintillating 84 not out off 49 balls including four sixes.

The U.S. managed 132-8 in reply, putting up a decent fight but never really coming close to chasing down the target.

“Only I can tell how much pressure I was feeling,” player of the match Suryakumar said. “But I had the belief. I knew if I bat till the end, I can make a difference.”

“It was a little different wicket. But...

we cannot brush everything under the carpet. We need to bat much better.”

Earlier, the predominantly Indian fans at the Wankhede Stadium probably expected sixes and fours to rain down after U.S. captain Monank Patel elected to field.

Instead, it was a long procession of India’s top-order batters returning to the pavilion after a spectacular meltdown of the world’s top-ranked T20 team.

SHARMA GOLDEN DUCK

Opener Abhishek Sharma, the world’s number one T20 batter, fell for a first-ball duck and in the final Powerplay over Shadley van Schalkwyk claimed three wickets in five deliveries to leave India reeling on 46-4.

Ishan Kishan (20) and Tilak Varma (25) could not convert their starts while Shivam Dube departed for a golden duck in that over from van Schalkwyk.

Rinku Singh, Hardik Pandya and Axar Patel also perished trying to swing their way out of trouble.

But Suryakumar responded to the crisis with a captain’s knock as he raced to a 36-ball fifty before plundering 21 runs from the final over bowled by Saurabh Netravalkar.

Mohammed Siraj (3-29) vindicated his inclusion in the side with an early two-wicket burst, while Arshdeep Singh also tasted success as they reduced the U.S. to 31-3 in the Powerplay overs.

Sanjay Krishnamurthi (37) and Milind Kumar (34) defied India with a 58-run

stand but once the partnership ended, India were firmly in charge.

“I thought our bowlers did a good job,” the U.S. captain Patel said.

“We dropped catches and that cost us. At one stage, felt we could restrict them for 130.”

In Colombo, the Netherlands nearly pulled off a major upset before Faheem Ashraf’s breezy cameo secured Pakistan a nervy three-wicket win with three balls to spare in Group A.

In a group C match in Kolkata, West Indies fast bowler Romario Shepherd claimed four wickets in five balls, including a hat-trick, as the twice champions thumped Scotland by 35 runs.

-REUTERS



Cricket – ICC Men’s T20 World Cup 2026 – Group A – India v United States – Wankhede Stadium, Mumbai, India – February 7, 2026 India’s Arshdeep Singh celebrates after dismissing Monank Patel of the U.S.



Cricket – ICC Men’s T20 World Cup 2026 – Group A – India v United States – Wankhede Stadium, Mumbai, India – February 7, 2026 India fans in the stands celebrate after Suryakumar Yadav hits a six.

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