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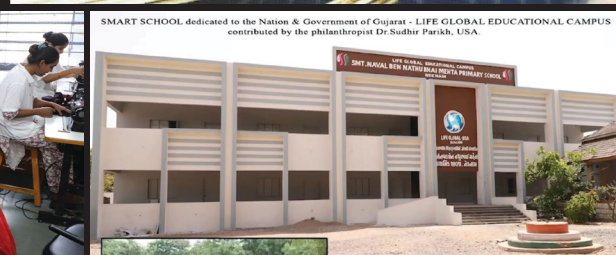
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**PAGES 4, 6**

## Life Global USA's 10th Anniversary Gala Celebrates Building 125 Schools, Women's Empowerment Initiatives With Project 'Life' India

Fundraising gala raises more than \$2 million under the leadership of Dr. Sudhir Parikh, Dr. Arun Palkhiwala, and Amar Shah

PHOTOS: LIFE GLOBAL USA

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# Life Global USA's 10th Anniversary Gala Celebrates Building 125 Schools, Women's Empowerment Initiatives With Project 'Life' India

By A Staff Writer

**Fundraising gala raises more than \$2 million under the leadership of Dr. Sudhir Parikh, Dr. Arun Palkhiwala, and Amar Shah**

**T**he Moghul Ballroom in Edison, New Jersey was abuzz with excitement August 9, 2026, as hundreds of attendees celebrated the 10 years of achievements by Life Global USA, an umbrella organization that supports several NGOs in India.

In the last 10 years Life Global USA has raised \$7 million and disbursed the same amount to development projects ranging from education and building schools, to women's empowerment and health services, with nearly 100 percent of funds going to projects.

Chairman of Life Global, Padma Shri recipient Dr. Sudhir Parikh, founder of Parikh Worldwide Media/ITV Gold, along with Founder Amar Shah, and President Dr. Arun Palkhiwala, are the leading lights of the organization, who over the



India's Consul General in NY Binaya Srikanta Pradhan addressing the Life Global USA 10th Anniversary celebration in New Jersey August 9, 2026. Dr. Sudhir Parikh, Chairman of Life Global USA, right, and Meetal Koticha Shah of Project 'Life' India, left, look on.



Padma Shri recipient Dr. Sudhir Parikh, Chairman of Life Global USA, addresses the August 9, 2026 gathering.

last decade, have managed the successful implementation of landmark projects in India, but also opened their wallets to contribute to the success.

At the August 9 event, Life Global got pledges of more than \$500,000, bringing the total funds raised in 2026 to more

than \$2 million. Attendees also enjoyed an auction of cricket bats, a live musical concert by Dhun featuring songs by yesteryear legends Mohammad Rafi and Kishore Kumar, recognition of the achievements of partner NGOs like Project 'Life' India.

Apart from Dr. Parikh, Amar Shah, and Dr. Palkhiwala, the high-profile attendees included India's Consul General in New York Binaya Srikanta Pradhan, leading Life Global patron Sharad Shah, representatives of Project 'Life' India's

-CONTINUED ON PAGE 6



Dr. Arun Palkhiwala, President of Life Global USA addressing the August 9, 2026, 10th Anniversary celebrations of the organization.



Founder of Life Global USA Amar Shah addressing the 10th Anniversary celebrations August 9, 2026.



Sharad Shah, a major patron of Life Global USA with Dr. Sudhir Parikh, speaking at the August 9, 2026 event.



Sharad Shah, a major patron of Life Global USA with Dr. Sudhir Parikh, speaking at the August 9, 2026 event.



Meetal Koticha Shah, Joint Executive Trustee and CEO of Project 'Life' India addresses the Life Global USA celebration in New Jersey.



A section of the audience at the 10th Anniversary of Life Global USA August 9, 2026, in New Jersey



Attendees stand for the national anthems at the Life Global USA celebration of its 10th Anniversary held in New Jersey.

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# Life Global USA's 10th Anniversary Gala Celebrates Building 125 Schools, Women's Empowerment Initiatives With Project 'Life' India

-CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

Joint Executive Trustee and CEO Meetal Koticha Shah, and Chief Development & Operating Officer Rushikesh Pandya, as well as many supporters and donors, public officials, and philanthropists.

Consul General Pradhan appreciated the Indian-American community's contribution to India's development. He especially recognized Dr. Parikh and Life Global USA for their sustained humanitarian work and service to communities in India.

Dr. Parikh in his speech highlighted the work of Life Global and the \$7 million it has contributed during the last 10 years of humanitarian service. He urged donors to support the organization's US\$2 million fundraising goal for 2026, emphasizing Life Global's transparent, donor-focused approach and commitment to supporting Project 'Life' and partner charities in India.

Dr. Palkhiwala highlighted key initia-

tives of the organization over the years and reaffirmed the shared commitment to saving lives, empowering communities and creating a sustainable impact.

The audience viewed a special presentation on the 10-year journey of Life Global USA, followed by an introduction to Project 'Life' and its humanitarian work in Gujarat. The Chief Minister of Gujarat Bhupendra Patel sent a recognition of Life Global's humanitarian contribution. A special tribute was paid to Chandrakant Koticha, founder of Project 'Life' Rajkot, for his 5 decades of commitment to building the blood banking infrastructure, Thalassaemia prevention, environmental conservation, education, and women's empowerment.

Meetal Koticha Shah made a presentation on Project 'Life' India's journey, highlighting its work on education, women's empowerment, blood banking, Thalassaemia prevention and environmental and other humanitarian initiatives.

In his keynote address, Rushikesh Pandya, CDOO, Project 'Life', described the

evening as more than an anniversary celebration—it was a celebration of a shared humanitarian journey across borders.

## ABOUT LIFE GLOBAL USA

Life Global USA supports notable NGOs in India including Project 'Life' India which is 48 years old this year; Gram Shree Trust through which Life Global supports Patola artisans; Gandhi Ashram Trust where 600 girls stay and get an education from Grade 1 to College level; Sewa Rural in Jhagadia, Gujarat, where it is helping expand and modernize a hospital; ESI, an environmental trust where Life Global is helping build 500 homes with solar power; and Ratna Nidhi Charitable Trust which brings libraries, donates prescription glasses, etc. to underserved areas.

Two of the most notable projects

undertaken by Life Global USA are 1. the rebuilding of the 110 year old school built by Mahatma Gandhi in Khedbrahma; and 2. The building of Idar Chatrayalaya on land acquired by Vinoba Bhave from the King of Idar, for which Dr. Haren Joshi and Dr. Pratima Tolat of US, donated

\$125,000.

With the August 9 event, because of the contributions received, Life Global USA can support another 300 women (over and above the 3,000 already trained in various skills) as part of the women's empowerment initiatives. Another \$350,000 raised from the August 9 event, will help toward developing the 11 acre land for Gandhi Ashram Education Sankul, Founder Amar Shah said. Shah was given

a Humanitarian Award from Congresswoman Nellie Pou of New Jersey during the event.



## Some Projects Supported By Life Global USA

SMART SCHOOL dedicated to the Nation & Government of Gujarat - LIFE GLOBAL EDUCATIONAL CAMPUS contributed by the philanthropist Dr. Sudhir Parikh, USA.



One of the schools developed for educating underprivileged children in project supported by Life Global USA and contributed by Padma Shri recipient Dr. Sudhir Parikh, Chairman of Life Global



Life Global USA supported project to bring solar power to some homes in rural Gujarat.

Supporting Lives - Empowering Women



Training women in acquiring sewing skills as part of women's empowerment projects supported by Life Global USA.

Preventing Thalassaemia - Marshaling Awareness & Screening



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# Analysis: The 'Samosa Caucus' In Congress May Be Diminished But Will Indian American Influence Also Decline?

By ELA DUTT

**Keep an eye on the new and/or younger cohort lining up to fill the gaps.**

**T**wo incumbent Indian American Congressmen have lost their party primaries and will not be contesting for seats on Capitol Hill come November. The original five, and then 6, members lost Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi, D-Illinois, whose term ends in January; And Rep. Shri Thanedar, D-Michigan, a more recent member of Congress, leave Capitol Hill at the same time.

The irony is the loss within their own party, a Democratic Party undergoing soul-searching and unifying voices in the midst of not just a surge of their Democratic Socialist wing, but also a desire for change – elements have now brought the opponents of Thanedar and Krishnamoorthi to the fore. Thanedar lost to democratic socialist Donovan McKinney, and Krishnamoorthi fell to Lt. Gov. Juliana Stratton.

said.

Not only those running currently for office, but those who hold a strong potential of raising the momentum, such as longtime North Carolina lawmaker Jay Chaudhuri, currently a State Senator, or Virginia Lt. Gov. Ghazala Hashmi, Virginia State Senator Kannan Srinivasan.

The Indian American community now has two Lieutenant Governors positioned in two very important states, and their decisions regarding future public life are a hopeful indicator that the political participation of this group is far from diminished. Add to these two the possibility that Nabilah Islam Parkes of Georgia, who won her primary for Lt. Gov., will fare positively in November.

New Jersey stands out as one of the most impressive states for Indian Americans who have been active in politics and public policy circles for decades. Currently, not only are there 70 elected officials up and down the ballot, but also 2 candidates running for the US House of Representatives – Jay Vaingankar and Tina Shah. It also has 2 Indian Americans, Vin Gopal and Raj Mukher-

Illinois has 16 officials at different levels including 2 in the State House, and a few running in November (<https://iaimpact.org/state/illinois/>). For Indian Americans in Illinois and elsewhere, the loss of Krishnamoorthi will be felt. He was among the most visible and vocal of all Capitol Hill members, one who kept his grassroots connection not just with his own community, but with his constituents. There are nevertheless, some potential members who in coming years, may shoot for higher office, such as Illinois State Senator Ram Villivalam, and State House member Kevin Olickal.

"Impact is working to make California a bastion for South Asian candidates. Not only will we continue to increase our representation throughout the state at the local, state, and federal level, we will build a base of power, consisting of passionate volunteers and donors, to support qualified and talented candidates all over the country," IAImpact says.

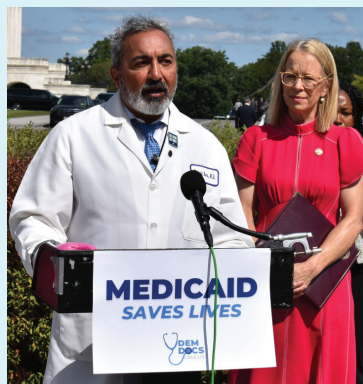
New York State, which boasts the 2nd largest concentration of Indian Americans (estimated 600,000) has fewer than what could be expected, but a strong contingent. Now with Mayor of NYC Zohran Mamdani leading



Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi, D-Ill.



Candidate for Congress from Michigan's 13th District, Shri Thanedar declaring his win November 8, 2022.



Congressman Ami Bera on Capitol Hill speaking during a press conference on changes to Medicaid.



Virginia Lieutenant Governor Ghazala Hashmi in Washington, D.C.



Congressman Suhas Subramanyam, D-Virginia

Way back in 1956, the first Indian American, Dalip Singh Saund, was elected to Congress from California. Then, after a very long hiatus, Dr. Ami Bera became the first of the new group of legislators to make it into the House. Just two years ago, in 2025, six Indian Americans were sworn into office. And not to forget, Senator Kamala Harris, D-California, who chose to run for Vice President and then a candidate for President.

Over the years, the rising number of Indian Americans in the 'Samosa Caucus' of Reps. Ami Bera, D-California, Ro Khanna, D-California, Pramila Jayapal, D-Washington, and Krishnamoorthi, were joined by Suhas Subramanyam, D-Virginia, and Thanedar. While they may be down to 3 lawmakers till November, there is still hope that new blood will join the group – viz. Dr. Amish Shah, D-Arizona, who won his primary from the First District in the July primary. And another aspirant for the US House, Nida Allam from North Carolina.

Not only that, the community has a younger generation of aspirants running for other offices of importance – Los Angeles Councilwoman Nithya Raman, a candidate for Los Angeles Mayor, has a good chance of being in the runoffs for the November general election pitted against incumbent Mayor Karen Bass. A few days ago (August 3), the Western States Carpenters Union endorsed her candidature. "This is big. The union represents tens of thousands of working people who build this city, and today they are standing with us," Raman

ji in the NJ State Senate, 5 State House members, at least 4 Mayors, and numerous City Councilors and School Board members.

Georgia holds the hope for sending several Indian Americans to the State Senate and House come November. For Georgia State Senate the hopefuls include – Saira Draper from District 44; Rahul Garabadu for District 7; For the Georgia State House – Jyot Singh from District 97; and Akbar Ali for District 106.

"In recent years, we've seen what's possible when Indian and South Asian Americans step up to flex our political power. Progress doesn't stop at winning elections—it's about championing the causes that matter most to our communities and creating a future where everyone can thrive," says Indian American Impact, a PAC dedicated to growing the power of Indian Americans at the local, state and national levels.

According to IA Impact's calculations – In Washington State alone, at least 11 people of Indian/South Asian heritage, hold office, ranging from school boards to the US House of Representatives.

In California, which has the largest Indian American population (900,000 according to IAImpact), at least 41 individuals are listed by IAImpact. They include numerous City Council members, three judges, a mayor, a couple of school board members, and a State House lawmaker, apart from the aforementioned national leaders Bera and Khanna. ([iaimpact.org/state/California](https://iaimpact.org/state/California)).

the pack, there are 16 elected officials from State Senate down to school board. ([iaimpact.org/state/new-york/](https://iaimpact.org/state/new-york/)) But at least one Republican (Komatireddy) is running for Attorney General, and two Democratic candidates aiming for Capitol Hill, Lisa Kaul, and Vichal Kumar.

Texas boasts at least 23 elected officials of South Asian heritage, going by IAImpact data. (<https://iaimpact.org/state/texas/>); Virginia at least 16 at all levels, including Rep. Subramanyam's re-run for the US House. (<https://iaimpact.org/state/virginia/>); Pennsylvania with 17 incumbents with several City Council members and School Board members, but higher up, a District Attorney Joe Khan, a County Commissioner Neil Makhija, a State Senator Nikil Saval, and a couple of State House members Arvind Venkat and Tarik Khan (<https://iaimpact.org/state/pennsylvania/>).

Ohio, which was among the first states to elect Indian Americans to office now has a Mayor of one of its major cities (Aftab Pureval of Cincinnati), has a Judge, several City Council members, and a State House member. (<https://iaimpact.org/state/ohio/>)

Michigan, which till January 2027, will have an Indian American in Thanedar on Capitol Hill, has some notable elected officials in its State House, viz. Padma Kuppa and Ranjeev Puri, and a State Senator of many years standing Sam Singh (<https://iaimpact.org/state/michigan/>)

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# August 15: The Independence Day That I Carry With Me

By DEVANSH MALHOTRA

**T**his Independence Day, I will not be standing in a crowd in Delhi or watching a flag go up at my old school. I will be thousands of miles away, probably explaining to a confused American friend why I care so much about a holiday that is not even on their calendar.

But when the Indian flag shows up on my screen, or a familiar song plays, or I see someone celebrating with the tricolor, I know exactly what it means to me. India is a place I grew up in. A place I still miss. A place that shaped who I am. And a home that, despite the distance, I never really left behind, even if I did leave behind a few too many awkward flag-hoisting-day photos.

When I was a kid, Independence Day was just a day I looked forward to. There were flags, there was music, and a general feeling that the whole country had shown up at the same party. I did not think much about the deeper meaning of it. I mostly thought about which snacks would show up.

I also remember getting dressed up for the day, which every Indian kid knows about and has complained about at least once. Somebody's mom would wrap you in an orange scarf, stick a paper cap on your head, and tell you to stand still for a photo. You did not get a say in this. You just smiled and wore it.

The streets looked different that day. Tricolor flags showed up everywhere — on cars, outside shops, on balconies, even tucked into school notebooks. TV channels played patriotic songs on a loop, the kind that get stuck in your head for the rest of the week whether you like it or not. And every year, there was that familiar moment of watching the flag go up.

That was then. Later, when I was thirteen, I moved from India to the United States. That is when I started seeing India differently.

Suddenly, the India I used to wake up in every single day became a place I visited, remembered, and talked about. Festivals, food, language, and even random school memories turned into things I missed without expecting to.

Independence Day feels different now. In India, you could not really miss August 15. Here, I have to go looking for it. I might spot an Indian flag outside a restaurant, scroll past a video of the celebrations in Delhi, or hear a song that drags me back to a school assembly I had honestly forgotten about. None of that is quite the same as being there, but it is enough to make the day feel closer again.

Watching the Independence Day celebrations on TV as a kid has remained one of my clearest memories. I did not understand every speech, but I understood the mood. The flags, the crowds, the ceremony — it all felt bigger than an ordinary day off from school, and for a kid, that is already a pretty high bar to clear.

Now I watch those same celebrations from America. Now I am mostly experiencing India through memory, and occasionally through a friend's Instagram story.

Memory is pretty powerful on its own. A random phrase can bring back an entire conversation. A specific snack can remind me of a family gathering. Even the Indian flag on my phone screen can make me think about the streets I grew up around — and, weirdly, about my grandfather



PHOTO: COURTESY DEVANSH MALHOTRA

Devansh Malhotra's childhood memories of getting dressed up for Independence Day celebration.



Devansh Malhotra celebrating Independence Day in the US.



Independence Day celebration remembered.

insisting I pose for "just one more photo" at every family event, always claiming it was the last one.

Maybe that is part of what Independence Day means for people like me, who grew up in India and now live

somewhere else. Distance does not weaken the connection. Sometimes it just makes you notice it more, usually at random moments, like hearing "Vande Mataram" playing in a grocery store parking lot for no reason.

Living in America has also changed how I think about independence in general. My generation is inheriting a very different India than the one that existed in 1947 — we grew up with smartphones, social media, and video calls to relatives across the planet. At the same time, we carry forward traditions and stories that existed long before any of us showed up.

That mix is what makes my generation's connection to India interesting. I can live in America and still feel something when I hear the national anthem. I can celebrate Fourth of July and still look forward to Diwali, Holi, and August 15. Identity just does not fit into one neat box, and trying to force it into one is more trouble than it is worth.

And so, every August, as Independence Day gets closer, I think back to those mornings from my childhood in India.

**Devansh Malhotra, 15, is a junior at West Windsor Plainsboro High School South, New Jersey.**

# Sanjay Kapoor Connects With New Jersey Fans At Edison Event



Pareksha Agnihotri received the Best Swimmer of the Year 2026 Award.



Kapoor posed for photographs, greeted attendees, shared anecdotes from his career and interacted with the audience.

By A STAFF WRITER

**E**DISON, N.J. — Bollywood actor and producer Sanjay Kapoor met with fans, shared stories from his career and joined in music and dancing during a special event at the ITV GOLD Auditorium in Edison.

Presented by ITV GOLD in association with Tina Goyal, with Meenu Gupta serving as national promoter representing VOG USA, the event drew Bollywood fans from across the Tri-State area for an evening of live music, conversation and celebrity interaction.

The program opened with a live performance by Rhythm Tolee, led by Gurpreet Singh and his team, featuring a selection of Bollywood songs. Rajan Gupta and Chitra also performed several numbers, accompanied by Monty on tabla and Sudeip on guitar.

Members of the cast and crew of the upcoming global production "Miracles 2.0," led by producer-director Reema Kapani, were also introduced during the program.

Kapani later joined Kapoor for a fireside conversation about his film career, experiences in Bollywood and his views on changes in the entertainment industry.

Kapoor shared anecdotes from his career and interacted with audience members throughout the evening. He also surprised guests by dancing to some of his popular Bollywood songs, drawing an enthusiastic response from the crowd.

Kapoor posed for photographs, greeted attendees and spent time speaking with fans during the event.

Several individuals were also recognized with awards during the program.

Surya Sharma received the Women of the Year 2026 Award in Information Technology.

Pareksha Agnihotri received the Best Swimmer of the Year 2026 Award.

Preeti Singh was honored as Outstanding Lead Actress 2026 for "Miracles 2.0: The Reckoning," directed by Reema Kapani and produced by EchoDreams.

Ben Karn received the Model of the Year 2026 Award.

Raj Gupta and Raju Singla received a Special Award, presented by Meenu Gupta of VOG USA.

The gathering at the ITV GOLD Auditorium on Oak Tree Road also included dining and networking opportunities for guests.

Organizers credited the efforts of Gupta, Goyal, Ilayas Quraishi, COO of ITV GOLD, and the ITV GOLD team for coordinating the event.

The program concluded with music, dancing and interaction between Kapoor and attendees.



Surya Sharma received the Women of the Year 2026 Award in Information Technology.

# India At 79: Taking Stock Of A Nation And A Civilization

By RAMESH RAO

Every Independence Day, Indians reflect on the journey that began in 1947. Some celebrate the country's remarkable economic transformation, democratic resilience, and growing global stature. Others lament persistent poverty, weak governance, corruption, and social divisions. Still others look beyond economics and politics, asking what India's ancient civilization can contribute to the modern world. After nearly eight decades of independence, perhaps the more useful question is not whether India has succeeded or failed, but how we should honestly assess where the nation stands today.

If one chooses to see the glass as half full, the evidence is not difficult to find. India's economic and technological transformation has been extraordinary. Poverty has declined substantially, digital payments have become ubiquitous, financial inclusion has expanded through bank accounts linked to mobile technology, and infrastructure development has accelerated. Supporters of the Narendra Modi government also cite improvements in welfare delivery, healthcare access, manufacturing initiatives under the "Make in India" program, national security, women's empowerment, and India's growing geopolitical influence. During a recent visit to India, I met several people who urged even skeptical observers like me to allow the country more time to realize its enormous potential.

Economic achievements, however, do not erase everyday experience. Critics argue that beneath the headlines lies a far less flattering reality. There is a jarring quality to the "We are the Vishwa Guru" proclamations of some who ignore the "concrete realities" of present-day India – where no road runs straight, where no driver maintains their lane, and where no work, it seems, can be done without greasing the palms of someone. Our cities are a patchwork of the ugly, the dilapidated, the crooked, and the smelly. If one goes looking or is invited to a wealthy friend's place, one can see how the well-endowed build their ostentatious dwellings and palatial apartment complexes. Fancy restaurants serve food from across the world to the disposable-income-endowed generation of "techies" who rush to their air-conditioned corporate offices to escape the din of "reality," while across the street we find weary men and women living on meagre and unassured incomes, eating little to save a little for the inevitability of disease, loss, accident, and debt. Among them are the 1.5 million or so delivery service workers who jump on their scooters and bicycles to deliver whatever it is their wealthy patrons seek within 10 to 15 minutes, rain, shine, rabid dogs, or darkness.

The urban landscape is only one side of the picture. India's smaller towns and villages reveal many of the same structural weaknesses, and any amount of romanticization of how hardy and wise our rural folks are can mask how tawdry and ugly their dwelling places are, how a clean restroom is a rarity, how careless they are about maintaining and respecting public spaces.

Underlying many of these problems is a demographic reality that cannot be ignored. India is home to 18 percent of the world's population on barely 2 percent of its land area. There are just too many people, and not acknowledging the dangers awaiting them – unemployment and job mismatch, infrastructure and resource strain, widespread poverty and inequality, vote bank politics, and the looming threat of AI – will ensure the "end of India". Thus, while the glass-half-full folks can talk about the demographic dividend, the glass-half-empty critics can point out that Indian leaders have their heads buried in the sand and are unprepared to face the cataclysm of a vast, unprepared or poorly prepared population straining the country's infrastructure



PHOTO: IMAGE CREATED USING CHATGPT

to breaking point, led by a cabal of the crooked.

The consequences extend beyond India's borders. They also influence how the rest of the world sees the country. India seems to make the news only when some disaster strikes, or when lists of the best and worst in something or the other are published, with India almost always ranked on the bottom rungs. Our universities and research centers don't make it to the top 100; our sporting abilities are mostly confined to the cricket pitches; our cities are ranked among the most crowded and the unhealthiest; and our heritage places are described as unkempt and ill-managed. Who wants to be friends with us, then? How many tourists will visit India and tell the world that it is their most sought-after destination and that they will visit again and again?

These shortcomings are symptoms rather than causes. If one asks why these problems persist decade after decade, the answer increasingly points toward India's institutions rather than its people. Indian discontent with democracy is valid because India's diversity fault lines have been taken advantage of by politicians and commenters who spend billions to win elections and then rob the public coffers dry as an "election dividend." The judicial system delivers justice poorly and late, if ever, and India's caste divisions are both leveraged to gain public office while at the same time sought to be "annihilated." The caste-horse is flogged regularly and publicly to keep it alive, and Western academic institutions and policymakers join hands with the local critics to paint the Indian horse saffron. Deliberately ignored is the "reservation train" that is overcrowded and long, to which more coaches continue to be added to allow more people to clamber onto the gravy train to claim more and more "reservation seats".

None of this is to deny India's remarkable strengths. Every criticism has its counterargument, and every weakness can be balanced by an undeniable achievement. But, at this juncture, Indians need to be paying more careful attention to poor governance by the feudal and criminal political classes, the privileging of the unprepared and underprepared under the guise of caste discrimination, the weakness and fragility of India's schools and colleges, and the cunning foreign hands of

religious monopolists seeking to undermine the Hindu foundation of India's civilization. Policymakers should be seriously working to tackle carefully and systematically the overcrowding of cities, the threat and dangers of climate change and extreme weather that can break the already creaky and weak infrastructure, cybersecurity and digital fraud, underprepared and absent teachers, and the mountains of disinformation and misinformation that weaken communities and families.

There is, however, another way of judging India's place in the world—one that goes beyond GDP, infrastructure, or institutional rankings. If India's material achievements invite debate, its civilizational legacy offers a different standard altogether.

India has never been a meddling and meddlesome nation, has never waged war against others unless attacked, and our philosophy of "you to yours, we to ours, and there are many ways to reach God" is the most embracing and energizing way of accepting our common humanity, and that is the only way to ensure that the human species survives. India's greatest contribution has arguably never been military or political power. Rather, it has been the search for knowledge—of the self, consciousness, and humanity's place in the cosmos.

Civilizations endure not because they are perfect, but because they possess the capacity for self-correction. India's future will depend on whether it can once again reform itself while remaining true to its civilizational foundations. Indians are resilient, and the strong family networks, the innate ability to adapt, and a strong belief in perseverance and faith in the goodness of the many Gods have kept India a functioning, thriving nation and a strong civilization. If Indians can rethink governance, refashion public institutions, resist the temptation of Abrahamic uniformity, respect and take care of public spaces, continue to believe in and strive for excellence, and leverage the wisdom of their sages, then there is hope for India that is Bharat.

**Ramesh Rao recently retired as Professor of Communications at Columbus State University, Columbus, GA.**

## ASTROLOGY



## This week for you

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

**ARIES:** This week encourages steady progress. Skills bring recognition. Wise financial planning helps being secure.Extra attention to your fitness routine helps. Family life is and harmonious. Romantic relationships feels a little distant,. A short getaway may leave you feeling relaxed. Ancestral property prove beneficial in the future. Helping other brings satisfaction. Students get great feedback for efforts.

**TAURUS:** Multiple reasons to stay hopeful. Good health allows you to enjoy life. Opportunities help you accomplish goals. Planning finances will help. Support can restore balance in family matters. Romance brings warmth. A trip can lift your spirits. Keep patience in property matters. Community service may help. Interns may gain valuable learning experiences.

**GEMINI:** Health is the strongest asset. Satisfying results by smart investments. Determination will keep you moving forward. Mutual understanding will improve family matters. Love life likely to strengthen your emotional bond. Travel can be refreshing. Helping others by sharing your success may bring deep fulfillment. Students with a disciplined study routine are likely to see improved performance.

**CANCER:** Personal and professional life will upgrade this week. Professional growth seems likely. Stronger family connections can be comforting. Maintain your overall health. Smart investments may strengthen security. Meaningful moments with your partner strengthen your relationship. A picnic may be recharging. Homebuyers come across an appealing property. Generosity can bring peace. Students are likely to perform well.

**LEO:** Financial plans may strengthen your stability. Maintaining a healthy, lifestyle can keep you inspired. Professional challenges become valuable lessons that support future growth. Family support is likely to bring comfort. Romantic relationships can grow stronger . A trip may create happy memories. Property matters offer promising opportunities. Students may achieve success after hard work and consistent effort.

**VIRGO:** Smart investments may strengthen your finances. Good health can help you maintain a steady routine. Growing responsibilities at work leads to progress. Family harmony may bring comfort and emotional happiness. Your love life can flourish. A trip or group outing may offer a refreshing break. Property matters may yield favorable results. Helping community brings satisfaction. Students achieve rewarding results with persistence.

**LIBRA:** Opportunities and life lessons awaits. Focus brings progress. Communication strengthens family ties. Changing fitness routine helps. Love relationships grow stronger. Past financial choices continue to offer stability. A thoughtful purchase brings happiness Travel open doors to new viewpoints. Generosity deepens connections. Students see improved outcomes if managed time effectively

**SCORPIO:** The week may bring growth in personal and professional areas. Healthy habits can improve well-being, while finances may strengthen stability. Leadership skills could boost career progress. Family harmony, romance, and travel may bring joy. Property investments and networking may offer opportunities, while students may benefit from online learning.

**SAGITTARIUS:** Relationships may strengthen this week, while wise financial planning can support future stability. Professional connections may help overcome challenges. Family support brings comfort . Travel may create exciting memories, while home improvements could enhance property value Community service can be rewarding, and students may benefit from a balanced approach to learning.

**CAPRICORN:** The week bring positive developments across different areas of life. Finances could improve. Your health and energy levels are likely to stay strong. Relationships may grow more balanced, while family connections bring happiness. Workplace challenges help enhance your skills and support future growth. Property matters may remain favorable. Relaxing at home may be fulfilling than travel, offering time for reflection.

**AQUARIUS:** Prioritizing your physical and emotional health is important. Smart budgeting improve financial stability. Meaningful moments strengthen relationships. Work may bring a sense of accomplishment, while love relationships can deepen through patience. Singles may focus on self-growth, home projects may progress well . Group learning may support students in gaining better understanding.

**PISCES:** The week may bring joy through family encouragement and financial confidence. Support can provide motivation. Thoughtful planning for finances lead to long-term benefits. Romantic relationships may grow warmer. Focusing on selfcare can help maintain energy. Creativity supports career progress. Travel plans require flexibility. Property investments could offer promising returns, while students may benefit from new learning opportunities.

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# Viksit Bharat 2047: A Roadmap To Become A Developed Nation

By Dr. Mohan Kumar

It is creditable that the Government of India has set for itself and the nation a crucial goal: That India should become Viksit Bharat by 2047, which would be the one hundredth year anniversary of India's independence. While there is general agreement that the term Viksit Bharat denotes a developed country, it is still necessary for public policy purposes to break the concept down to know what it entails. What follows is an attempt to do so.

**A 10 trillion-dollar economy:** While India can be legitimately proud of being the fourth largest economy in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the world, the fact remains that for a population that is approaching 1.5 billion, the present GDP of \$4.5 trillion is a little below par. So, if India must become "Viksit" in the real sense of the term, the GDP must grow significantly to attain the figure of at least 10 trillion dollars. This is entirely achievable if we can do a couple of things. First, 40 per cent of our GDP is foreign trade, so our share of international trade must simply double. In particular, our share of global exports, which hovers around 2 per cent, should rise to 10 per cent. Second, our Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), which for the latest year is a little short of \$ 100 billion, must also grow manifold. In order for the above two things to happen, Government of India must carry out deep seated economic reforms in areas such as land, labour, power, agriculture, infrastructure and regulatory obstacles.

**Inclusive Economic Growth:** While there is no question that the GDP must accelerate, as mentioned above, that alone is not enough. Growth must be inclusive which is to say that it must percolate to the downtrodden people who are at the bottom of the pyramid. The government has conceived excellent schemes such as the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana. But going beyond that, job creation for the youth must become a national mantra for both the Central and State Governments. Since it is not possible for the Government alone or even the organized sector to provide all the jobs that are necessary, it is vitally important to enable an ecosystem where

PHOTO: REUTERS/FRANCIS MASCARENHAS/ FILE PHOTO



The Indian Rupee logo is seen inside the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) headquarters in Mumbai, India, December 6, 2024.

the youth become entrepreneurs and job creators rather than be mere job seekers. Present levels of economic inequality are unsustainable and efforts must be made to make the society much more egalitarian.

**Skilling:** It is well recognized that our education system relies heavily on rote learning and it churns out thousands of graduates every year who may not be immediately employable. In this context, skilling and re-skilling of graduates becomes crucial. The idea of vocational training, industry-academic collaboration and imparting tech skills (including Artificial Intelligence) for our graduates must assume mission-mode importance. Spending on education, in both the public and private sector must increase exponentially, especially in states that lag the national average. In parallel, Research and Development must be given prime importance in all relevant institutions. It is indeed true that a population that is close to 1.5 billion can be a demographic dividend for India. But that is true only if the population is skilled enough to face the challenges of a knowledge economy.

**Health:** India's healthcare system is undergoing dramatic transformation, driven by digitalization and by infrastructure expansion. But challenges remain on account of rising medical costs and a growing chronic

disease burden. Government has undertaken significant efforts such as Ayushman Bharat and Ayushman Arogya Mandir schemes which have made a big impact on providing healthcare in the country. Medical college seats have more than doubled since 2014, in an attempt to bridge the doctor-patient gap. Successful attempts have also been made to promote India as a global hub for medical tourism. Despite all this, serious challenges remain. Public spending on healthcare still lags desired levels. India also runs the risk of becoming the global capital for heart disease and diabetes. India therefore needs to continue its massive transformation of public health infrastructure to make it accessible, affordable and quality-driven for the vast majority of its population. The National Health Mission is doing a commendable job. It simply needs to be strengthened and streamlined.

**Sustainable Development:** India must not emulate the ways of either the industrialized countries which followed a high-carbon pathway to development or indeed that of China, which even today burns more coal than the rest of the world put together. India is the only major economy today which potentially has the possibility of following a low-carbon pathway to a high-income economy based on sustainable development. And India must do it not just because the world wants it to, but because the people of this country deserve it as a matter of right.

**Conclusion:** India is indeed well positioned to become Viksit Bharat by 2047. But the country needs to be on mission-mode and a whole-of-government approach is required to make sure that no stone is left unturned in this national endeavour. By any reckoning, the next twenty years will be the most crucial period in India's history.



PHOTO: PROVIDED

**Dr Mohan Kumar is a former Indian Ambassador to France and currently Dean/Professor at O.P. Jindal Global University. Views are personal.**

## Citizen-Centric Diplomacy Of India

By Ambassador Jeitendra Kumar Tripathi (Retd.)

Diplomacy had been traditionally understood as conduct of bilateral relations between the states focusing on the negotiations only in political, economic and security related drivers. However, the advent of the current century, having witnessed a sea change in the ground realities due to the globalization, rapid scientific and technological development and increased mobility, transformed and expanded the scope of diplomacy focusing on the new dimensions. India also could not remain untouched by this transformation and adopted a foreign policy with the citizen-centric diplomacy at its heart. This policy places the welfare, security and interest of the country's citizen at its core making Indian citizens an important part of its external engagements which has made, in turn, the Ministry of External Affairs more responsive to their needs.

### How did it evolve?

Until the turn of the last century, the Indians living abroad (NRIs) and persons of Indian origin had no place in the policies of the government as they were considered to be the persons, migrated out of India for their own individual interest with no contribution towards the development of India. However, at the beginning of the current century, it was realized that these Indians

PHOTO: REUTERS/DELIWKA CHHABRA



A family stranded in Dubai amid the U.S.-Israel conflict with Iran, arrives at the Indira Gandhi International Airport in New Delhi, India, March 3, 2026.

not only contribute to the economy of their homeland by way of remittances and investments but also play a significant role in the governments of their residence. The importance of Indian diaspora can be understood by the fact that currently the Indian diaspora, with the population of more than 35.4 million (more than the combined population of Australia and New Zealand) has remitted US\$ 135.46 billion in the last financial year!

Moreover, many persons of Indian origin have risen to important positions in academic institutions and in their governments which underlines their importance in our foreign policy calculus. However, lately the Indian governments started paying more attention to this vast reservoir of talent and resources. The annual Pravasi Sammelan and Pravasi awards had given momentum to the outreach to the eminent personalities of Indian diaspora. The Ministry of External Affairs has taken many initiatives to ensure the welfare of Indian citizens visiting abroad for employment, business or educational purposes.

### Key features of the Citizen -Centric Diplomacy

These initiatives cover the period from the application for passport to visa, travel, safe stay and return to India. In view of the growing number of Indians willing to visit abroad, the Government has opened new passport offices, passport application centers in all districts, digitized the procedure and opened more international airports to facilitate international travel. PDOT (Prior to Departure Orientation and Training) programs are in place, a Pravasi Bhartiya Bima Yojna has been started to ensure the health insurance of Indians abroad, Migration and Mobility Partnership pacts have been signed with eight countries and Social Security agreements have been signed with nineteen countries to ensure

-CONTINUED ON PAGE 15

# India: The Trusted First Responder

By AMBASSADOR SUCHITRA DURAI

**W**hen a giant wave of sea-water struck Chennai's Marina Beach on the morning of 26 December 2004, pulling in its wake fisherfolk and a group of children playing cricket, little did their brethren know that an entire region had been struck and that, across the Bay of Bengal, local people and foreign tourists on Thai and Indonesian beaches had also been swept away.

The Indian Ocean Tsunami of December 2004 was a natural catastrophe of a magnitude not experienced by humanity in recent times. It resulted in the death of almost a quarter million people and displacement of a couple of million people in 14 countries of the Indo-Pacific.

It also marked the coming of age of India's HADR (Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief) institutional capacity. India not only dealt with death and destruction in its mainland, particularly in the coastal states of Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu as well as major devastation in its island territories of Andaman & Nicobar (A&N) islands but also provided speedy assistance to countries in south and south-east Asia including Sri Lanka, Maldives, Thailand and Indonesia. Simultaneously, India launched five HADR operations, two national and three international – Operation Madad (coastal south India), Operation Sea waves (A&N), Operation Castor (Maldives), Operation Rainbow (Sri Lanka) and Operation Gambhir (Indonesia). These involved the three defence services and the Indian coast guard – more than 40 ships, several transport aircraft and helicopters as well as more than 20,000 military personnel were deployed.

India's actions led to its recognition as a credible first responder in the Indo-Pacific region. Soon thereafter, the Disaster Management Act of 2005 was adopted by the Indian parliament providing the legal and institutional framework for disaster preparedness, mitigation and response, a three-layered structure at the national, state and district level and the establishment of a dedicated force, the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) to respond to such calamities.

The 2004 Tsunami also saw the coming together of the navies of four countries – Australia, India, Japan and the US – to coordinate the delivery of assistance in a collaborative effort that eventually evolved into the Quad.

India has handled several major natural disasters in the last few decades both in its immediate neighborhood as well in distant lands.

In December 2014, India undertook one of its most



Indian army rescue workers helping a victim of the Feb. 6, 2023, earthquake in Turkey and Syria.

complex humanitarian missions, Operation Neer, to supply drinking water to the Maldives after that country's only desalination plant broke down. Indian Air Force aircraft and Indian naval ships worked round the clock to supply more than 1,500 tons of drinking water to the Maldives becoming the first country to respond to the request from the Maldives.

In April 2015, when a massive earthquake hit Nepal, India launched a comprehensive rescue and relief mission in the form of Operation Maitri within six hours of the initial tremors. Several thousand stranded Indians and foreign nationals were evacuated by air and land routes and hundreds of tons of essential material were delivered. Several field hospitals were set up. After the relief operations were completed, India launched a major rehabilitation and reconstruction package of around USD 2 billion for Nepal.

Following a devastating earthquake that struck Myanmar in end March 2025, India launched Operation Brahma, a huge tri-services combined with NDRF mission that supplied over 750 MT of materials and equipment including essential medicines and food aid. Field hospitals were set up in Mandalay, while engineering teams were deployed for reconnaissance and assessment of structural damage. Op Brahma was a classic whole-of-government HADR endeavor by the Government of India.

In end 2025, India provided massive support under Operation Sagar Bandhu to Sri Lanka that was hit by cyclone Ditwah. Food, equipment, medicines and other essential items were provided and more than 1000 tons of dry rations were supplied.

Beyond its immediate neighborhood, India also re-

sponded with alacrity to requests from Türkiye and Syria when they were struck by earthquakes in 2023. Under Operation Dost, India was a first responder sending large Search and Rescue (SAR) teams of more than 250 personnel along with medical teams and dog squads to both countries as well as materials support.

In March 2019, India provided HADR to cyclone-hit Mozambique and in 2023 provided assistance to Malawi which was affected by a tropical cyclone.

Recently, on 26 June, 2026 India undertook its most ambitious HADR initiative when 30 tons of humanitarian relief materials accompanied by a 41-member team comprising experienced rescue personnel and medical professionals arrived in two C-17s to earthquake hit Venezuela.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, India supplied 300 million doses of vaccine to 99 countries and 2 United Nations entities under the Vaccine Maitri initiatives since January 2021, along with essential medicines and medical support.

For India, HADR has moved from being an episodic activity to a continuous global engagement. It is an essential feature of India's foreign and security policy that was formally enunciated in the Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) doctrine announced by Prime Minister Modi during a visit to Mauritius in March 2015 which underpins India's approach to the Indian Ocean Region; it became an intrinsic part of our Indo-Pacific Vision and Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) announced in 2019 and evolved into the MAHASAGAR vision outlined by PM Modi in March 2025.

India's approach is not merely reactive. It has also put in place frameworks for international cooperation in the area of prevention and mitigation through contributing towards the setting up of an international tsunami warning system as well as the launch of the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI). The CDRI (comprising 60 member states) works with 25 small island developing states to build disaster resilient infrastructure including schools, hospitals and homes.

By providing need-based and rapid assistance during emergencies and through its efforts to develop capacities for mutual benefit, India is seen as a reliable first responder and a force for global good.

**Suchitra Durai is former Ambassador of India to Thailand and Former High Commissioner of India to Kenya**



PHOTO: PROVIDED

## Citizen-Centric Diplomacy Of India

-CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14

the proper work environment for Indian workers. An e-migrate application has also been launched to educate such citizens about the rules and regulations. MADAD, a multi-lingual help portal, works round the clock to assist Indian citizens in need. It also examines the employment visas, the employer's status and the insurance cover provided by him to the prospective worker. The government has opened more embassies and consulates to cater to the needs of Indian citizens abroad. An Indian community wing, separate from the Consular wing, has been established to ensure well-being of the Indians living in that jurisdiction. Indian Community Welfare Fund has been established in all our diplomatic missions and posts abroad to assist our citizens in case of emergency through temporary shelters, legal assistance and air tickets to India for the destitute/stranded

Indians. Besides, open houses are being organized in India embassies at regular intervals to listen to and address the grievances of Indian community. Moreover, the government conducted a number of successful rescue operations for the Indian citizens stranded in violence-hit areas. Ukraine, South Sudan, Yemen have been some of such recent operations.

### Challenges

The citizen-centric diplomacy also faces its own challenges. The growing number of Indians visiting abroad for various purposes has put a heavy pressure on our missions which already suffer from a shortage of manpower and resource-crunch. Effectively assisting the Indian community in a war-torn country also becomes a challenge in view of unstable situation. Misinformation by Indian touts and social media, and different local legal systems compound the problems.

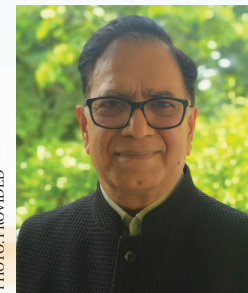
### The way forward

Allocation of sufficient staff and funds at the disposal

of our missions abroad and their adequate training before posting there can mitigate the challenges. The pre-departure orientation should be made compulsory for every Indian going abroad for employment or education. A curb on touts misleading such Indians is imperative.

### Conclusion

It is heartening that the importance of citizen in our diplomacy has finally been realized and the Government is addressing their issues with an objective and positive attitude. With allocation of more resources and strict action against the touts, our citizen-centric diplomacy will certainly bear more fruit.



Ambassador Jeitendra Kumar Tripathi (Retd.)

PHOTO: PROVIDED

# Avoiding an RFE on Your EB-4 Religious Worker Petition (Form I-360)

By David H. Nachman, Esq

## IN MEMORIAM



Michael Phulwani



David Nachman



Ludka Zimovcak



Snehal Batra

Between visa bulletin retrogression and the program's repeated near-expirations, religious organizations sponsoring an EB-4 special immigrant worker already have enough to track. A Request for Evidence adds months to a process that's often already been years in the making. Most I-360 religious worker RFEs trace back to a small set of recurring gaps, and a petition built to close those gaps upfront has a much smoother path through USCIS.

### Proving the Organization Qualifies

USCIS wants clear proof that the sponsoring organization is a genuine, tax-exempt religious denomination or an affiliated organization, not just an entity that says it's religious in nature. A determination letter from the IRS confirming 501(c)(3) status is the strongest anchor here, and if the organization is affiliated with a larger denomination rather than independently recognized, officers often ask for documentation showing that religious and organizational tie. Groups that skip this step, or submit outdated IRS documentation, are among the most common sources of an RFE on this category.

### Proving the Two-Year Membership Requirement

A beneficiary must show continuous membership in the denomination for at least two full years immediately before filing. This sounds simple on paper, but it's one of the most frequently challenged elements of the petition, particularly when a worker has moved between congregations or spent part of that period abroad. Letters from religious leadership confirming dates of membership, along with supporting records like baptismal certificates, ordination documents, or attendance history, help close this gap. Vague or undated membership letters are a near-guarantee of an RFE.

### Proving the Job Itself Qualifies

The position has to fall into one of three buckets: a minister, a traditional religious vocation or occupation, or a religious worker performing duties for a nonprofit religious organization. Officers frequently issue RFEs when a job description reads more like general administrative or clerical work than a genuinely religious duty. The petition should describe day-to-day responsibilities in specific, concrete terms, not generic language borrowed from an unrelated template, and should tie those duties clearly to the position's religious function within the organization.

### Proving Ability to Compensate

Smaller congregations and faith communities are the group most likely to get flagged here. USCIS wants evidence the organization can actually support the worker, whether through a salary, room and board, or another documented form of support. Bank statements, budgets, or prior compensation records for similar positions all help, and organizations relying on non-salaried support, such as room and board plus a stipend, should spell out exactly what that support consists of rather than leaving USCIS to guess.

### Frequently Asked Questions

**What's the single most common reason I-360 religious worker petitions get an RFE?**

Gaps in proving the two-year continuous membership requirement, especially when the beneficiary moved between congregations or spent time abroad during that period. Does the organization need its own 501(c)(3) determination letter, or can it rely on a parent denomination's status? Either can work, but if relying on a parent denomination, the petition needs to clearly document the affiliation between the two organizations.

**Can a small congregation with limited funds still sponsor a religious worker?**

Yes, but the petition should clearly document exactly how the worker will be supported, whether through salary, room and board, or another specific arrangement, rather than describing support in vague terms.

**Does responding to an RFE delay the case significantly?**

Yes. Given how retrogression already affects this category, an avoidable RFE can add months to a timeline that's often already tight.

If your organization is preparing an EB-4 religious worker petition or responding to an RFE, our attorneys are available to help.

If you or your family members have any questions about how Special Immigrant Juvenile Status or other immigration matters 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.

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# India's Space Sector: A Launchpad For Global Partnerships

By GURJIT SINGH, FORMER AMBASSADOR AND AUTHOR

**G**rowing competition in outer space provides India with a unique opportunity to shape a narrative in which collaboration, rather than confrontation, drives space exploration. Recognized as a trustworthy and cost-effective spacefaring nation, India is now well placed to transform its technological advances into enduring international partnerships that contribute to scientific progress, economic growth, and sustainable development.

India's journey into space has been distinctive. Unlike many space programs that emerged from Cold War rivalries, India's program was conceived as an instrument of national development. Dr. Vikram Sarabhai anchored India's space vision in practical applications that would improve the lives of ordinary people. Under his leadership, satellites were developed to strengthen communications, weather forecasting, disaster management, healthcare, agriculture and education. This development-oriented philosophy remains central to India's space program and resonates strongly with the needs of countries in the Global South, which seek practical applications of space technology rather than prestige alone.

Today, India's achievements extend beyond developmental applications. The Chandrayaan missions, the Mars Orbiter Mission, the Aditya-L1 solar observatory, and the forthcoming Gaganyaan human spaceflight program have established India as a nation capable of executing sophisticated and reliable space missions. Chandrayaan-3's successful soft landing near the Moon's south pole placed India among an exclusive group of space powers while demonstrating that world-class innovation can be achieved at comparatively modest cost.

India's growing credibility comes at a time when the global space economy is expanding rapidly. Valued at over US\$600 billion today and projected to approach US\$1.8 trillion by 2035, the sector is increasingly driven by commercial activity in satellite communications, Earth observation, navigation, climate services, broadband connectivity, and emerging fields such as in-orbit servicing and lunar exploration. Many countries aspire to participate but lack indigenous capabilities. They seek dependable long-term partners rather than merely launch providers.

India possesses the capabilities to meet these requirements. The liberalization of the space sector in 2020 transformed the ecosystem by opening it to private participation. The establishment of the Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Centre (IN-SPACe), the expanding commercial role of NewSpace India Limited, and the growth of private enterprises have created one of the world's most dynamic emerging space ecosystems. Indian startups are developing launch vehicles, satellite platforms, geospatial applications and propulsion technologies that are attracting global investment and customers. Companies such as Skyroot Aerospace, Pixxel and Agnikul Cosmos have demonstrated that Indian private enterprise can compete internationally in advanced space technologies.

The next step is to internationalize this ecosystem.



PHOTOS: X @DEPUTYSECSTATE

Earth to Space: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi interacting with astronaut Shubhanshu Shukla who is aboard ISS.

Rather than positioning itself only as a low-cost launch destination, India will offer comprehensive partnerships encompassing satellite design, launch services, mission operations, ground stations, astronaut training, capacity building and downstream applications in agriculture, disaster management and maritime security. Such integrated partnerships would be valuable for countries across the Global South and the Indo-Pacific

and technological capabilities.

These partnerships reinforce India's standing as a leading voice of the Global South. India offers development partnerships based on affordability, reliability and mutual respect rather than creating technological dependence. Space cooperation has therefore become an increasingly important instrument of Indian diplomacy, strengthening bilateral relationships while delivering tangible developmental benefits.

To realize its full potential, India will aim to sustain the momentum of reform. Faster regulatory approvals, greater access to venture capital, stronger intellectual property protection, and closer collaboration among research institutions, industry and academia will be essential. Public procurement policies would continue supporting Indian startups, enabling them to scale up, innovate and integrate into global supply chains.

India is positioned to play a larger role in shaping the governance of outer space. Orbital congestion, space debris, responsible resource utilization and equitable access to emerging space opportunities are becoming pressing international concerns. As space activities expand, there will be an increasing need for countries capable of building consensus on responsible norms and practices. India's long-standing commitment to the peaceful uses of outer space, combined with its growing technological capabilities, equips it to contribute meaningfully to the development of rules that promote transparency, sustainability and equitable access.

The coming decade will determine not only which countries lead in space

but also how space is governed. With its scientific capabilities, entrepreneurial ecosystem and international credibility, India is uniquely placed to bridge the gap between established and emerging space nations. By building collaborative partnerships founded on inclusivity, mutual benefit and innovation, India can transform its space program into a major pillar of its global engagement.

In an increasingly divided world, India's space sector offers a powerful reminder that the greatest achievements in space are those that bring nations together. That may well become India's most enduring contribution to humanity's next frontier.



US Principal Deputy National Security Advisor (PDNSA) Jon Finan, Deputy Secretary of State Kurt Campbell, and Indian Ambassador to the United States Vinay Kwatra at Johnson Space Center in Houston, meeting Indian astronauts and other officials, December 17, 2024.

seeking affordable, customized and reliable technologies to meet their development priorities.

India has demonstrated the diplomatic value of such cooperation. Through the South Asia Satellite, it provided communication and developmental benefits to neighboring countries. Indian launch vehicles have successfully placed hundreds of foreign satellites into orbit for governments, universities and commercial operators around the world. India's decision to join the Artemis Accords reflects its willingness to participate in the peaceful exploration of the Moon through international collaboration. Cooperation with NASA, the European Space Agency and JAXA has strengthened India's scien-

The Washington Post

# Disney World’s trash cans have a cult following. Now they’re going away.

By Hannah Sampson

When Skip Sher and fellow Disney enthusiasts assembled in late 2021 for a day of drinking around Epcot near Orlando, Florida, they met up at a trash can outside a pub in the theme park’s United Kingdom Pavilion. They agreed to meet there again in the future.

Someone suggested the recently formed Disney Day Drinkers Club needed a mascot, said Sher, the group’s founder. “So we were like, what about this trash can?”

That can, which they called Binny, became an icon for the club. While Binny has since moved to the great unknown, much to the group’s consternation, its legend remains. And so does the pull of Disney Parks trash cans: themed to their location and cute enough to inspire lines of merchandise, costumes and online devotees.

Most importantly, they are convenient for holding a visitor’s drink or snacks on their flat tops during Epcot’s frequent festivals, where food and drinks are sold at booths around the park. Calling it a “wacky thing,” Sher said he has seen people bring picnic tablecloths, candles and nice dishes to set atop bins. “Trash can tables” have become common spots to rest and nosh or snap photos when attendees wander the park’s World Showcase sampling beer flights, dumplings or sliders on little dishes.

“At Walt Disney World, especially at Epcot, people form emotional attachments to these because they’re such a part of your Epcot experience,” said Julie Tremaine, a contributing editor for SFGate covering travel and theme parks. She wrote a story in 2023 calling trash cans potentially Disney parks fans’ “weirdest obsession yet.”

So it should be no surprise that there were wails in the street - or at least on social media - when Disney made official last week what fans were already noticing. This summer in Florida, the old cans are moving out and a new, less table-like variety is coming in. “Before you ask, no I’m not okay,” one fan wrote in a caption on a TikTok that showed him wearing his company’s T-shirt, which carried an image of the old can, and standing next to a new bin. “RIP to my favorite tables [the Epcot trash cans],” the text on the video reads.



## ‘Same magic. Smarter can.’

In a video shared on an official Disney Facebook page, an old-timey voice-over accompanies black-and-white images of receptacles at various locations around the Florida parks. In the old model, flaps cover the view of the interior and must be pushed in.

“Walt Disney World trash cans: Iconic. Dependable. Beloved by fans around the world,” the narrator says. “But what if we told you they just got even better?”

The next generation of cans, the video says, hold more trash, are powered by the sun and can compact waste automatically. “Same magic, smarter can,” the voice-over says. The new bins are taller, with a more sloped top.

Visitors can open them by stepping on a pedal at the bottom or pulling open the front, the video shows. They will continue to be individually decorated to reflect the theme of their surroundings.

“Yes, these trash cans might become your new favorite photo spot,” the video says.

It promises the bins are “appearing soon” across the resort.

According to a statement from the company, the new trash cans were tested in a pilot program in some spaces last year and have been added to more areas this summer. The rollout will continue in the coming months across the four theme parks, water parks, the Disney Springs shopping and dining complex, and ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex.

Fans responded with questions.

“But our tables! The finest outdoor dining spots!” wrote one. “But what about trash can table time?” another bemoaned.

A third had a different qualm: “Do these look stylish enough to sell as miniatures in a merch store??? No.”

## Trash can lore

The retiring cans have ties all the way back to Walt Disney, according to an episode of the documentary series “Behind the Attraction” on Disney+.

As explained in the show, Disney made sure a trash can would be located every 30 feet throughout the parks to keep litter at bay. He didn’t want people to see the actual trash, so the cans got swinging flaps that obscured the view.

Over the years, the company has sold collectible figures, lunch bags, candy bins, pins, salt and pepper shakers, ornaments, and a plush toy modeled after the original cans. Fans have made necklaces, dresses, party costumes and T-shirts that nodded to the cans’ dual lives as tables. In the past, the company operated a talking trash can; more recently, some have been equipped to spread bubbles.

A Facebook fan club admires them as “little works of art.”

“Disney fans love a secret tribal branding thing,” said AJ Wolfe, owner of the Disney Food Blog and author of the book “Disney Adults.” “That’s something that just fly-by-night guests aren’t going to notice or love. But real Disney fans, this is their icon.”

Wolfe finds eating on the trash cans gross, but she thinks guests can still make it work with the new models.

“I always have a tray with a ton of food and usually like seven glasses of champagne on it,” she said. “Maybe I can’t use them as a table anymore because my tray will probably wobble. Your one little boat of food is going to be just fine.”



Photo by: Hannah Sampson — TWP

## No-touch upgrade

While Tremaine of SFGate said she has never thought twice about putting her drink on one of the garbage cans - “the faith that we have in Disney and the level of cleanliness” - she did not enjoy having to push the swinging door in to toss her trash.

“Not having to touch the flap is a really big upgrade,” she said.

On a recent visit to one of the Florida parks, Sher of the Disney Day Drinkers tested the food-holding abilities of the new cans with a cocktail and some garlic noodles.

“The center of it is perfectly usable for that type of activity,” he said. “The corners start to slope downward, but it’s also a larger space than the original trash cans. ... I think it gets the job done.”

Sher, who also started the Disney Adult Society on social media, said that as a Disney fan, he’s gotten used to constant change - a reality Walt Disney embraced. And he’s hoping the parks’ loss will be his gain.

“A lot of places do resale of Disney artifacts and things, so I’m excited because I think pretty soon all these places will be flooded with Epcot trash cans,” he said. “I plan on getting one.”

# FIA Chicago Launches Grand India Independence Day Celebrations With Tricolor Hoisting In Downtown Chicago

By BHAILAL M. PATEL

**Indian Tricolor Flies Alongside the American Flag as Hundreds Celebrate the Spirit of Freedom, Democracy, and Unity**

The Federation of Indian Associations (FIA—Chicago Estd.1980), one of the Midwest's largest and most respected umbrella organizations representing the Indian-American community since 1980, officially launched its two-week celebration of India's 80th Independence Day with a magnificent Tricolor Hoisting Ceremony in the heart of downtown Chicago.

Against the breathtaking backdrop of Chicago's iconic skyline, the Indian National Flag soared proudly alongside the Stars and Stripes, creating a powerful symbol of friendship between the world's largest democracy, India, and one of the world's oldest democracies, the United States. The unforgettable moment filled the gathering with pride, patriotism, and gratitude as community members celebrated both their Indian heritage and their contributions to American society.

The ceremony began with a warm welcome by FIA Trustee Rakesh Malhotra, who invited FIA President Hemant Patel, Executive Vice President Anil Singh, Vice Presidents Rohit Joshi, Joy (Dipen) Shah, Bhavesh (Bob) Patel, and Secretary Arvind Ankleshwaria to the stage.

President Hemant Patel welcomed the distinguished guests, elected officials, veterans, community leaders, and families who had gathered to commemorate India's Independence Day.

FIA executives honored several distinguished guests with floral bouquets, including Retired Brigadier Navin Ahuja, Hon. Consul General of India Shri Somnath Ghosh, Cook County Treasurer Maria Pappas, Alderwoman Debra Silverstein, FIA Trustee Rakesh Malhotra, former FIA executive Hashmukh Patel, veteran Arvind Ankleshwaria.

The event also attracted prominent leaders from numerous community organizations, including Harish Topiwala, Prakash Anturkar, Ajit Shah, Smitesh Shah, and Nishant Soni, representing organizations such as Elder Care MAFS, UMAS, and the International University of Vedic Wellness (IUVW).

The patriotic celebration opened with a stirring rendition of the American National Anthem, followed by enthusiastic chants of "God Bless America!" and "Long Live America!", reflecting the Indian-American community's appreciation for the opportunities and freedoms offered by their adopted homeland.

The highlight of the morning came as the Indian Tricolor was ceremoniously hoisted beside the American flag. As the flag ascended against the clear blue Chicago sky, the audience joined together in singing "Vande Mataram," creating an atmosphere of deep patriotism and emotion.

Young participants Shanaya Kapoor,



PHOTOS: FIA CHICAGO ESTD 1980



The Indian Tricolor was ceremoniously hoisted beside the American flag, the audience joined together in singing "Vande Mataram," creating an atmosphere of deep patriotism and emotion.

Aashvi Kapoor, Kanakh Sharma, and Bhavya Sharma inspired the audience with their enthusiastic participation, while six-year-old Dhara Shukla beautifully led the singing of the Indian National Anthem. The ceremony concluded with thunderous chants of "Bharat Mata Ki Jai!" echoing throughout downtown Chicago.

Adding to the emotion of the occasion, FIA President Hemant Patel delivered a heartfelt rendition of "Ae Mere Watan Ke Logon," the timeless patriotic song honoring the brave soldiers who sacrificed their lives for India's freedom and security.

Addressing the gathering, Hon. Young participants spoke about the significance of India's Independence Day and highlighted the shared democratic values that continue to strengthen the partnership between India and the United States. He praised the Indian-American community for serving as a bridge between the two great nations.

In one of the ceremony's most memorable addresses, Cook County Treasurer Maria Pappas praised the remarkable contributions of Indian Americans across Illinois.

She observed that Illinois would be

like a desert without the talent, intellect, innovation, and leadership of the Indian-American community. She applauded their achievements in medicine, education, science, technology, business, research, and public service before presenting a special proclamation to FIA President Hemant Patel recognizing the celebration and FIA Chicago's outstanding community leadership.

Alderwoman Debra Silverstein extended her warm greetings and congratulated the Indian-American community on India's Independence Day, acknowledging its longstanding contributions to the City of Chicago.

Following the flag-hoisting ceremony, attendees were captivated by a spectacular cultural presentation from Twinkling Stars Academy, featuring Vishnu, Shivani, Lakshmi, and Vijay.

Their beautifully choreographed "Five Elements Dance" portrayed Earth, Air, Fire, Water, and Sky through colorful costumes, creative choreography, and patriotic themes representing both India and the United States. Beyond its artistic brilliance, the performance conveyed a meaningful message about environmen-

tal conservation, unity, and community responsibility.

The audience responded with a standing ovation, while organizers extended special appreciation to the parents and instructors who nurtured the young performers' remarkable talents.

In his presidential address, Hemant Patel reminded attendees that Independence Day is both a celebration and a solemn reminder of the sacrifices made for freedom. "Freedom was never free, and our celebrations must carry both joy and deep gratitude," he said.

He urged everyone to honor the countless freedom fighters and soldiers whose courage secured India's independence.

President Patel also emphasized the importance of promoting global peace and called upon world leaders to confront the root causes of religious extremism and terrorism while working together to build a safer and more harmonious future.

As the celebration concluded, FIA Chicago announced its remaining Independence Day events: Tiranga Car Rally – Saturday, August 15, 2026, 10:00 a.m., India Hub, Schaumburg. Patriotic Gala – Sunday, August 16, 2026, 6:00 p.m., Haridham Mandir, Schaumburg. Grand India Independence Day Parade – Sunday, August 23, 2026, 11:00 a.m., Devon Avenue, Chicago.

President Patel invited the entire community to participate in these patriotic celebrations and continue honoring India's independence while celebrating the enduring friendship between India and the United States.

As the Indian Tricolor continued to wave proudly over downtown Chicago, the ceremony served as a powerful reminder that freedom, democracy, diversity, and unity remain values that inspire generations across the globe.



Top (left to right): FIA President Hemant Patel and Consul General of India Shri Somnath Ghosh is addressing the audience.

Above: Retired Brigadier Navin Ahuja addressing the audience.



Cook County Treasurer Maria in center with Young participants, FIA Trustee and Executive Committee Members

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