



(Photo courtesy: X@actorvijay)

Gen Z Storm Shakes India Polls

R. Suryamurthy

The 2026 assembly verdicts may be remembered less for who won where, and more for who quietly rewired the rules of the game: India's Gen Z electorate. Much like youth-driven political churn seen in Sri Lanka's 2022 upheaval, Bangladesh's student-led mobilizations, and Nepal's periodic anti-establishment waves, India's youngest voters appear to have crossed a psychological threshold—from spectators to decisive political actors.

This is not a uniform "youth wave" in the conventional sense. It is sharper, more transactional, and often contradictory. In West Bengal, Gen Z voters appear to have tilted the balance toward the BJP, helping convert anti-incumbency into a structural collapse of the Trinamool Congress. In Tamil Nadu, the same demographic powered actor Vijay's TVK into a stunning debut, dismantling decades of Dravidian bipolarity. Two very different ideological outcomes, driven by a similar generational instinct: impatience with the status quo.

That is the defining feature of India's Gen Z moment. Unlike older voting blocs anchored in identity, loyalty, or legacy narratives, young voters are behaving more like swing constituencies in Western democracies—fluid, skeptical, and quick to punish. Their choices in 2026 suggest that performance, perception, and relatability now outweigh ideological consistency. In Bengal, this translated into support for a party promising governance and jobs; in Tamil Nadu, it meant embracing a political outsider who symbolized disruption itself.

The parallels with South Asia are instructive. In Sri Lanka, youth anger over economic collapse delegitimized entrenched elites almost overnight. In Bangladesh, student activism has increasingly shaped political discourse, even when not directly altering electoral outcomes. Nepal's youth, similarly, have oscillated between insurgent politics and reformist demands. Across the region, a pattern is visible: young voters are less interested in preserving systems than in stress-testing them.

(Contd. on page 4)

UN Member States Commemorate International Day of Vesak

T. Vishnudatta Jayaraman

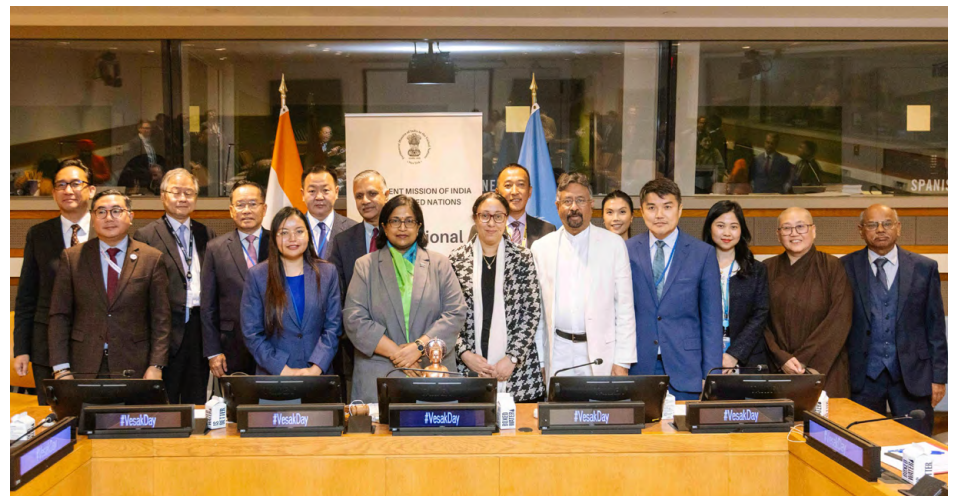
To mark the International Day of Vesak, the Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations, in collaboration with the Permanent Missions of Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, Cambodia, Japan, Lao PDR, Mongolia, the Republic of Korea, Thailand, and Viet Nam, convened a panel discussion on April 30, 2026, at the United Nations Headquarters in New York.

The discussion centered on the theme "Leveraging Buddhist Heritage for Strengthening Global Peace and Cooperation," examining how shared Buddhist traditions across the region can contribute to fostering international collaboration amid ongoing global conflicts.

countries leading to an organic evolution of a transnational spiritual corridor."

Delivering the keynote address, Nalanda University Vice Chancellor Prof. Sachin Chaturvedi underscored "interdependence and collective welfare" as "central tenets" of Buddhism that remain relevant to contemporary global governance. He called for a shift from sector-specific and quantitative development models toward integrated, human-centric approaches to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, linking Buddhist philosophy to "ethical development, sustainability, and global systems thinking."

Speakers from participating countries emphasized the continued relevance of Buddhist values in today's complex global envi-



Representatives of Permanent Missions gather to mark the International Day of Vesak on April 30, 2026, at the United Nations, in New York. (Photo courtesy: India at UN)

In her welcome remarks, Chargé d'affaires Ambassador Yojna Patel highlighted the "deep civilizational bond" linking communities from the Indian Ocean to the Indo-Pacific through shared traditions of Buddhist "art and culture, architecture, flow of ideas and values."

She also outlined India's efforts to "revitalize and strengthen" these ties, including the development of a Buddhist tourism circuit and initiatives to preserve and restore "Buddhist heritage sites, monasteries, conservation of archaeological sites, and pilgrimage infrastructure in neighboring partner

environment. Member States highlighted principles such as compassion, moderation, and dialogue, drawing from their own traditions. Bhutan referenced its Gross National Happiness framework, Japan, Thailand, and Viet Nam emphasized human dignity, and the Republic of Korea noted Buddhism's growing resonance among younger generations.

Sri Lanka's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Jayantha Jayasuriya, noted that Vesak, the most sacred day for Buddhists, falls on the full moon of May and commemorates the birth, enlightenment, and passing of Lord Buddha. (Contd. on page 3)

Sri Lanka Food Festival Highlights Cuisine, Culture in Chennai

T. Vishnudatta Jayaraman

The Deputy High Commission of Sri Lanka hosted the inaugural "Sri Lanka Food Festival 2026" from April 24 to 26 at Green Meadows Resort in Chennai, India.

Organized under the initiative of Sri Lanka's Deputy High Commissioner, Dr. Ganesanathan Geathiswaran, the festival aimed to present the country's rich and "diverse culinary heritage," offering attendees an authentic experience of traditional Sri Lankan cuisine. The event was held in collaboration



(Photo courtesy: Deputy High Commission of Sri Lanka in Chennai)

with several partners, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Employment and Tourism of Sri Lanka; the Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau; Cinnamon Grand Hotel, Colombo; the Ministry of External Affairs of India; India Tourism, Government of India; the Tourism Department of the Government of Tamil Nadu; Dwarka Productions Chennai; and Tarlton Tea.

According to the Deputy High Commission, the festival sought to "strengthen cultural ties" between Sri Lanka and South India while

promoting "tourism, trade, and people-to-people connections" through a shared appreciation of culinary traditions.

Speaking to *South Asian Herald*, Dr. Geathiswaran said, "It is a matter of great pride and satisfaction that the first-ever Sri Lanka Food Festival 2026 has concluded successfully here in Chennai. What began as an initiative to share the authentic tastes of our island home quickly grew into a vibrant bridge between our people."

(Contd. on page 3)

Moore and Miller Launch 2026 Reelection Campaign in Maryland

SAH Staff Reporter



(Photo courtesy: Carter Elliott)

Maryland Governor Wes Moore, joined by First Lady Dawn Moore, Lieutenant Governor Aruna Miller, Second Gentleman David Miller, Comptroller Brooke Lierman, Prince George's County Executive Aisha Braveboy, and Maryland Democratic Party Vice Chair, Charlene Dukes, officially launched the 2026 reelection campaign at a rally in Prince George's County, on May 2, drawing hundreds of supporters and local leaders.

"If you never forget who you're fighting for, you will never stop fighting," said Moore. "In four years, we have delivered enormous progress and defied the false choices of insider politics. But there is still more work to do. Maryland is facing a tireless assault from a corrupt White House that keeps raising prices on everything from groceries to rent. But in the face of challenge, we steel our resolve and push forward."

Moore emphasized that the campaign aims to represent residents across all communities in the state. "And together, we will leave no one behind," he added.

First Lady Dawn Moore praised the Governor's leadership, stating, "Wes is a promise-keeper. He honors his word. He never tires. And he fights every day for the people of Maryland. Over the last four years, he has kept his promises to Marylanders, creating new pathways to work, wages, and wealth for all."

Lieutenant Governor Miller highlighted the administration's record and future plans.

"Today, we take the next step in our work to leave no one behind, and we're fired up to travel the state and meet Marylanders where they are," she said. "Together, we've done the hard work of turning values into action by making communities safer, expanding opportunity, and delivering real results for families. This has always been a partnership, with each other and with the people of Maryland."

Comptroller Lierman underscored the administration's collaborative approach, noting, "Governor Moore and Lieutenant Governor Miller have been true partners in delivering for Marylanders, whether we are working together at the Board of Public Works to make sure every state dollar delivers best value, joining forces to demand the Trump Administration reimburse Marylanders the \$4 billion taken from our families through illegal tariffs, or tackling the housing affordability crisis that so many of our neighbors face."

She added that with the federal government pulling back from Maryland, this partnership matters more than ever. "I am proud to stand with them as we keep building a Maryland that leaves no one behind," she added. Vice Chair Dukes reiterated the campaign's focus on continuity and state-wide impact. "The Moore-Miller administration has shown what it means to lead with purpose and deliver results. This election is about continuing that work and ensuring it reaches every part of our state," she said.

The statement noted that, with Governor Moore in office, Prince George's County has a "partner" in the Governor, who believes in and invests in the community.

According to a campaign statement, Moore-Miller for Maryland reported a record \$7 million raised in 2025, the highest amount ever collected in an off-year in the state, and entered 2026 with \$8 million in cash on hand.

The campaign also announced endorsements from several organizations, including the Maryland League of Conservation Voters, Maryland REALTORS®, the Maryland International Association of Fire Fighters, the Maryland State Education Association, and Service Employees International Union Local 500, along with support from Democrats and Republicans across the state.

Dartmouth To Honor Murthy

SAH Staff Reporter

Dartmouth College will confer an honorary Doctor of Science degree on Vivek Murthy at its upcoming Commencement, placing the Indian-origin physician at the center of a diverse group of global honorees.

Murthy, who served as the 19th and 21st U.S. Surgeon General, is being recognized for elevating public discourse on mental health—particularly the growing epidemic of loneliness and the impact of social media on young people. His tenure culminated in the 2025 report, "Parting Prescription for America," which argued that rebuilding community is essential to improving national well-being.

A Vice Admiral in the U.S. Public Health Service, Murthy led a corps of about 6,000 officers and became one of the most visible voices on preventive health. Since leaving office, he has launched *The Together Project*, a national initiative focused on



(Photo courtesy: Dartmouth College)

strengthening social connections, alongside hosting the *Staying Human* podcast.

Dartmouth President Sian Leah Beilock said this year's honorees reflect "excellence in the arts and sciences" and a commitment to public service.

Murthy, a Harvard and Yale alumnus and author of the bestseller *Together*, will join six other recipients spanning fields from comedy to diplomacy at the ceremony.

Nalanda Revival Gains Global Backing

SAH Staff Reporter



(Photo courtesy: X@India in New York)

US academics into dialogue with an Indian delegation led by Vice Chancellor Sachin Chaturvedi.

Chaturvedi outlined the university's ongoing transformation, describing efforts to reposition Nalanda—once among the world's oldest centers of learning—as a contemporary hub for global scholarship. He highlighted research initiatives in Buddhist studies and allied interdisciplinary fields, alongside efforts to build international partnerships and modern academic infrastructure.

The discussions focused on expanding collaboration between Nalanda and Western institutions, with participants exploring avenues for joint research, faculty exchanges, and student engagement.

US-based scholars welcomed the revival initiative, noting its potential to reconnect global academia with a historic seat of Buddhist learning. Several participants underscored the significance of engaging with Buddhist philosophy and history at its geographic and cultural source.

The roundtable concluded with a shared commitment to strengthening institutional ties and advancing cross-border scholarship.

In a statement, the consulate said the initiative goes beyond rebuilding a university, calling it an effort to restore a global center of knowledge that once shaped Asia's intellectual traditions.

The Consulate General of India in New York convened a high-level roundtable bringing together global scholars to discuss the revival of Nalanda University, in a move aimed at deepening Indo-US academic collaboration.

The event, organized in partnership with the Bihar-based university, brought leading

India-Emory Pact Eyes Health Innovation

SAH Staff Reporter

A high-level biotechnology summit at Emory University has underscored growing momentum in scientific collaboration between India and the United States, with leaders from academia, government and industry outlining a roadmap for deeper engagement.

Convened by the Consulate General of India in partnership with the university, the forum brought together researchers and policy voices to explore how bilateral cooperation can accelerate innovation in health-care and life sciences.



(Photo courtesy: X@India in Atlanta)

Moderated by Nita Sardana, the panel featured experts including Venkat Narayan and Anant

Madabhushi, who pointed to what they described as "strong complementarities" between India's scale

and Emory's advanced research ecosystem.

Discussions centered on expanding open-access research databases, with speakers arguing that wider data sharing could significantly accelerate global scientific breakthroughs. The need for diversified funding — spanning public, private and philanthropic sources — was also highlighted as critical to sustaining long-term innovation.

Artificial intelligence emerged as a key theme, particularly its potential to transform community healthcare. Experts said AI-driven tools could enable more personalized and scalable medical interventions, especially in underserved regions.

In keynote remarks, India's Consul General and Jane Gatewood said the partnership has evolved beyond traditional academic exchanges into joint research initiatives and capacity-building efforts.

They stressed that the collaboration is increasingly focused on delivering measurable global impact, particularly in tackling complex health challenges.

The summit is part of a broader push to position the India-U.S. biotechnology corridor as a major driver of next-generation healthcare solutions, reflecting a shared emphasis on innovation-led growth and international scientific cooperation.

UN Member States...

(Contd. from page 1)

He said the teachings of the Buddha guide humanity toward values such as loving kindness (Metta), sympathetic joy (Muditha), compassion (Karuna), and equanimity (Upekka), which can help address conflict and human suffering.

Jayasuriya also highlighted the historical influence of Emperor Asoka, noting, "He shifted the mode of administration from confrontations and conflicts to active dissemination and spread of righteousness and compassion, even beyond his kingdom."

He added, "His son, Mahinda, a Buddhist monk with a group of his companions led a mission from India to Sri Lanka during Emperor Asoka's reign and on his very first visit itself delivered a sermon to the then Ruler of Sri Lanka, King Devanampiyatissa, who thereafter embraced Buddhism and initiated several processes that deeply rooted Buddhism in the hearts of Sri Lankans."

He further noted that protecting and fostering "Budhha sasana" remains a constitutional responsibility of Sri Lanka.

Delegations from Mongolia, Lao PDR, and Cambodia reaffirmed their commitment to the principles of Lord Buddha, while Nepal emphasized the "Middle Path" as a framework for moderation and peaceful coexistence. Collectively, participants underscored that Buddhist heritage can serve as a unifying force to build "trust, people-to-people connections, and cooperative approaches to peace and development."

The observance aligns with United Nations General Assembly resolution 54/115, adopted in 1999, which formally recognizes the International Day of Vesak. The day, observed annually on the first full moon of May, commemorates the birth, enlightenment, and passing of Lord Buddha and highlights his enduring message of "compassion, peace and goodwill."

The resolution also acknowledges the historical and spiritual contributions of Buddhism over more than two and a half millennia and calls for appropriate observances at United Nations Headquarters and other UN offices, in consultation with relevant stakeholders.

Sri Lanka Food Festival...

(Contd. from page 1)

He noted that more than 700 guests, including diplomats, artists, business leaders, Rotarians, and families, attended the festival over three days, to experience Sri Lanka's culinary heritage. Their presence according to him underscored the "deep and enduring cultural connection" between Sri Lanka and South India.

Highlighting the broader impact of the event, Dr. Geathiswaran said, "I am especially heartened by the spirit of friendship this festival has inspired," adding that the Rotary Club of Chennai Coastal's announcement to donate an ambulance and renovate 30 schools in Sri Lanka is a "shining example" of how "shared meals" can lead to "shared goodwill" in healthcare and education.

"This festival has proven that food is not just nourishment it is a language of friendship," he added. "We look forward to many more such initiatives to promote tourism, trade, and people to people ties between Sri Lanka and southern India."

Notable attendees included Founder, Chairman and Chancellor of Vels University, Dr. Ishari K. Ganesh, who was the Chief Guest; District Governor of Rotary District 3234, Suresh Jain; President of the Rotary Club of Chennai Coastal, Navin Gupta; Blaze Kannan of Dwarka Productions; General Manager of Cinnamon Grand Hotel, Colombo, Nazoomi Azhar; and Sri Lankan actor Kalana Gunasekara.

The festival featured authentic dishes prepared by an expert culinary team from Cinnamon Grand, Colombo, as well as traditional performances by the Sri Lanka Police dance troupe.

Entrepreneur Anand Poojary Awarded Honorary Doctorate in Maryland

T. Vishnudatta Jayaraman

Entrepreneur Anand Poojary was awarded an Honorary Doctorate at the 111th commencement ceremony of Washington Adventist University, which marked the graduation of the Class of 2026 on May 3, in Maryland.

The Doctor of Humane Letters is conferred upon individuals who have provided "exemplary service to the community, or whose accomplishments are broad in scope and far reaching," Provost Cheryl Kisunzu said while announcing the awards. Virginia-based Shashi Chopra, founder of Global Seva Fund, was also awarded an honorary doctorate during the ceremony.

The University recognized Poojary for his distinguished service, entrepreneurial success in the restaurant and hospitality industries, and his association with diplomatic institutions, through which he has created employment opportunities for hundreds of individuals.

In his welcome address, University President Weymouth Spence said "It is a day filled with faith, joy, gratitude, reflection and great anticipation for what lies ahead. To our graduates, this day belongs to you," adding "You have persevered through challenges, embraced growth and committed yourselves to a journey of purpose and discovery."

Poojary, owner of Jewel of India and Woodlands Restaurant in Maryland, expressed gratitude upon receiving the



President of Washington Adventist University Weymouth Spence, presenting an Honorary Doctorate to Anand Poojary during the commencement ceremony on May 3, 2026, in Maryland. (Photo courtesy: T. Vishnudatta Jayaraman, SAH)

honor. "I stand before you today with deep gratitude and humility. To receive this honorary doctorate from Washington Adventist University is such a great honor – one I could never have imagined when my journey began in a small village in India," he said.

"I was not born into certainties or privilege," he said, adding that what he carried with him were values of "hard work, discipline, faith, and a deep respect for community." Those values, he noted, became his "foundation."

Reflecting on his move to the United States in 1995, Poojary said "I did not have a clear roadmap. Like many immigrants, I simply had a belief—that through hard work and staying true to my values."

Over the years, as he built restaurants and businesses, Poojary said he came to an important realization: "Success is not defined by what you build, but by how many people we help along the way."

"Today, this recognition is not mine alone," he added. "It belongs to my family—especially my wife, Sumita—who

has stood beside me through every challenge and every success. It belongs to my children, who inspire me every day. And it belongs to the many individuals who have been part of this journey."

Elisha Pulivarti, president of the US-India SME Council and a longtime friend of Poojary, told *South Asian Herald (SAH)* "Anand has been a great support to the community. This recognition is a testament to the impactful work he has done over the years."

CEO and President of Global Alliant, Rajan Natarajan, told *SAH* "I strongly believe this is a well-deserved and highly impactful recognition for Anand, who continues to make a significant difference in our community and society through his tireless dedication and commitment to uplifting others."

Angela Franco, president and CEO of the Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce, told *SAH* "I am very proud to celebrate Anand's honorary doctorate. He is not only a successful business owner but a great community leader."

Congratulating Poojary, Mayor of Takoma Park, Talisha Searcy told *SAH* "His dedication and accomplishments are an inspiration. Moreover, his connection to the university also serve as an example of how the business community can effectively partner with institutions of higher learning."



From left, Elisha Pulivarti, Sumita Poojary, Anand Poojary, Angela Franco, Talisha Searcy, Weymouth Spence, and Rajan Natarajan at the lunch reception on May 3, 2026, at Jewel of India in Maryland. (Photo courtesy: T. Vishnudatta Jayaraman, SAH)

US Moves to Protect Temples

SAH Staff Reporter

With Hindu temples in the United States increasingly finding themselves at the center of vandalism and intimidation incidents, U.S. lawmakers are moving to strengthen protections for worshippers, signaling what could become a broader federal response to rising threats against religious spaces.

Congressman Tom Suozzi has introduced the bipartisan Safeguarding Access to Congregations and Religious Establishments from Disruption (SACRED) Act, positioning it as a forward-looking measure to ensure safe access to mandirs, synagogues, mosques and churches alike. The bill is co-led by Republican Max Miller.

If enacted, the legislation would establish a 100-foot buffer zone around places of worship, making it a federal crime to intimidate, obstruct or harass individuals

attempting to enter. First-time violations could draw fines or up to one year in prison, with repeat offences carrying tougher penalties of up to three years. The proposal also allows victims to pursue civil remedies.

The initiative follows a series of high-profile incidents, including the desecration of a Hindu temple in New York, which lawmakers say reflects a wider pattern affecting multiple faith communities. Supporters argue that such episodes are no longer isolated, but part of a trend that demands pre-emptive legal safeguards.

"This is about anticipating where the problem is headed, not just reacting to where it has been," a congressional aide familiar with the bill said, underscoring its preventive intent.

Backed by a broad coalition — including the Anti-Defamation League, American Jewish Committee and the Islamic Society of North America — the legislation reflects



(Photo courtesy: suozzi.house.gov)

growing consensus that threats to religious access cut across communities.

Advocacy groups say the coming months will test whether Congress can balance constitutional protections for protest with the need to secure vulnerable spaces. If passed, the SACRED Act could mark a shift toward more explicit federal protections at the physical thresholds of worship — where, increasingly, tensions have been playing out.



South Asia Notes

Elizabeth Roche

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Stock Taking of Challenges and Opportunities for Indian Diplomacy

The West Asia/Middle East crisis, India's neighborhood, the China challenge, the state of multilateralism and multipolarity were some of the themes discussed at this year's Heads of Missions meeting in New Delhi.

For the uninitiated, the Heads of Missions or HoMs meet is generally an annual affair with Indian diplomats from across the world gathering to brainstorm on strategy and take stock of achievements of foreign policy goals. Making India a developed economy by 2047 and India's ties with Africa were the other topics on the table.

Expectedly, challenges thrown up by the Middle East crisis – i.e. shortage of fuel worldwide, security questions for the Gulf states, the future of Iran, etc. and its impact on the India growth story – were discussed. Two months into the war, Iran's leadership hasn't exactly folded despite the immense pressure mounted by the world's mightiest military, i.e. the US. Iran has successfully used geography i.e. closed the Straits of Hormuz and inflicted some of the pain its feeling on the world – India included. This in a world already reeling from Trump's irrational tariffs.

The UAE exiting the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, that decides on production and

prices of crude oil, is viewed as a consequence of the Iran war. But tensions were already seething with Saudi Arabia; they have now broken through the surface. This may give India easier access to more oil as the UAE wants to increase production. But Saudi Arabia and the UAE being at odds can also be a challenge. Both are strategic partners in whom India has heavily invested. So far, India had to balance Iran, the Arab States and Israel with the 2020 Abraham Accords, providing some relief. The new development could upset this.

In India's neighborhood, there are new governments and relations need careful tending, with China closely watching for opportunities to deepen its influence. Trump's unpredictability is seen as a reason for India rolling back strict rules unveiled in 2020, putting brakes on investments from China. But China isn't to be trusted entirely – it withheld or delayed export clearances for rare earth magnets and restricted specialty fertilizers in 2024-25 while an India-China thaw was underway.

India is hosting two key summits this year – BRICS and the fourth India-Africa Summit – that will give it a sense of what key partners think of multilateralism and multipolarity. India favors both but how many others feel the same in a chaotic might is right world?

constituency. Parties that mistake temporary alignment for durable loyalty will likely be corrected swiftly.

Third, authenticity matters more than pedigree. Whether it is a national party breaking new ground or a celebrity launching a political outfit, Gen Z voters are responding to perceived sincerity and immediacy. They are less tolerant of dynastic entitlement and more receptive to leaders who appear accessible—even if that accessibility is digitally constructed.

The larger implication for 2029 is clear: India is entering an era of "perform or perish" politics, accelerated by a generation that has little patience for incrementalism. Traditional parties—whether national or regional—will need to re-engineer not just their messaging but their organizational cultures to remain relevant.

If Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Nepal offered early signals of youth-driven disruption, India's 2026 verdict suggests the phenomenon has matured into something more consequential: a disciplined, electoral force capable of reshaping outcomes without overturning the system itself. That may prove to be the most significant shift of all.

Gen Z Storm...

(Contd. from page 1)

India's difference lies in scale and institutional continuity. With over 200 million voters in the 18-29 bracket, Gen Z here is not just a protest force—it is becoming an electoral arbiter. And unlike its regional counterparts, it is operating within a stable democratic framework, which makes its influence both more subtle and more enduring.

Three lessons emerge for future elections.

First, digital mobilization is no longer supplementary—it is foundational. Campaigns that successfully translated online sentiment into booth-level turnout reaped disproportionate rewards. The BJP's targeted youth outreach in Bengal and TVK's social media-driven surge in Tamil Nadu underscore this shift. Political communication is now being consumed in reels and memes, not rallies and manifestos.

Second, Gen Z is not ideologically captive. It can swing right, left, or toward entirely new formations depending on context. This volatility makes it a high-reward but high-risk

Homeland Round Up

BANGLADESH

Security Alert and Vigilance



(Photo generated by AI)

Bangladesh spent much of the past week on heightened alert following intelligence warnings of possible coordinated militant attacks. Authorities flagged sensitive locations—including parliament, religious sites, airports, and security installations—as potential targets. Surveillance was ramped up nationwide, with additional checks at major gateways such as Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport. The alert followed the arrest of a banned militant operative and concerns over fugitives linked to earlier unrest, prompting specialized units to intensify monitoring.

Economic Headwinds Persist

The government led by Prime Minister Tarique Rahman continues to navigate a fragile economic environment marked by slowing growth, inflationary pressures, and stress in the banking sector. External factors, including Middle East tensions affecting remittances and energy costs, have compounded the challenge. Efforts are underway to stabilize the economy and support private sector recovery.

Reform Debate Continues

Politically, the BNP administration is pushing ahead with its post-election agenda but faces scrutiny over delays and partial rollbacks of accountability measures introduced after the 2024 uprising. The debate over implementing earlier reform frameworks remains active, reflecting a delicate transition phase.

NEPAL

Governance Drive Gains Pace

Prime Minister Balendra Shah's government continued to advance its ambitious reform agenda, anchored in a 100-point plan. Measures such as public asset declarations, curbs on VIP privileges, and digital governance initiatives are being tracked through monitoring systems aimed at improving service delivery.

Land Disputes in Focus

Land reform emerged as a flashpoint, with the government pledging a permanent solution for genuine landless squatters while distinguishing them from illegal encroachments. The issue has triggered protests and evictions, underlining the social complexity of the policy.

Economic Signals Mixed

Customs revenue collections showed resilience at key border points despite disruptions, while infrastructure work—particularly road upgrades—continued. However, broader growth projections remain modest, weighed down by global uncertainties and the after-effects of earlier political unrest.

SRI LANKA

Energy Pressures Continue

Sri Lanka remains under economic strain from global energy disruptions. Measures

such as fuel rationing, price increases, and a shortened work week remain in place. Growth forecasts have been moderated, with reconstruction needs adding to fiscal pressure.

Coal Scandal Reverberates

The fallout from a major coal procurement scandal continues to dominate political discourse. Investigations into standard imports have led to high-level resignations and the establishment of a presidential inquiry. The episode has dented the government's anti-corruption credentials and intensified opposition criticism.

Tourism and Routine Governance

Tourism has shown resilience overall, though recent daily arrivals have softened slightly. Meanwhile, routine governance updates—from disaster preparedness to conservation initiatives—continued without major disruptions.

PAKISTAN

Mediation Role Expands



(Photo generated by AI)

Pakistan has positioned itself as a key diplomatic intermediary in efforts to revive U.S.-Iran talks. High-level engagements in Islamabad signaled an active regional role, although uncertainty persists after the cancellation of a planned U.S. envoy visit. Both civilian and military leadership remain engaged in backchannel diplomacy.

Security Indicators Improve

Data for April showed a notable decline in militant attacks and casualties for the second consecutive month, suggesting some success in ongoing counterterrorism operations. While the security situation remains fluid, the downward trend is significant.

Routine Political and Economic Activity

Domestic politics saw standard activity from government and opposition parties, with no major shifts. Economic updates remained steady, with inflation and fuel prices under watch amid broader regional pressures.

BHUTAN

Fuel Subsidy Measures Extended

Bhutan adjusted fuel prices under its price-smoothing framework while maintaining retail rates through subsidies, absorbing rising import costs. The move reflects efforts to shield consumers from global volatility.

Strong Growth Outlook

Economic projections remain robust, driven by hydropower expansion, though risks persist from oil price fluctuations and youth unemployment. Poverty levels are expected to continue declining.

Planning and Global Engagement

The government is reviewing its Five-Year Plan and advancing long-term initiatives, including the Gelephu Mindfulness City project. Bhutan is also preparing to host a regional media summit on climate action in June, signaling its continued engagement on global issues.

Editorial



The War Must End Soon

It is not in anybody's interest to see which side blinks first in the Tehran-Washington showdown. Into the third month, the debate in the power corridors of the United States is whether the 60-day deadline has passed for the administration to report to Congress, whether the pause of two weeks can be factored in, or if President Donald Trump needs to tell anything at all to lawmakers. What everyone is talking about is the War Powers Act of 1973, enacted during the Richard Nixon administration as a result of the Vietnam War—the termination of the use of United States Armed Forces unless Congress votes to continue the war.

President Trump has said "many" Presidents have exceeded the limit. "It's never been used. It's never been adhered to," has been the refrain. To be fair to President Trump, the track record of his predecessors has been mixed: Ronald Reagan in 1983 sought Congressional mandate for sending marines into Lebanon and stayed within the notification window; so did President George HW Bush with the First Gulf War in 1991 and his son, President George W Bush, for his campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq. But President Bill Clinton carried on his Kosovo bombings in 1999 for 78 days, and President Barack Obama even argued that the military campaign in Libya of 2011 did not qualify as hostilities; the NATO-led adventure went on for several months.

WHAT STARTED OFF AS A BOMBING CAMPAIGN TO HALT THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR PROGRAM SOON WANDERED INTO THE REALM OF REGIME CHANGE. FROM THEN ON, IT WAS ALL HELL BREAKING LOOSE IN THE MIDDLE EAST, WITH A WIDENING CONFLICT INVOLVING THE GULF NATIONS AND IRAN TAKING STEPS TO SHUT DOWN THE INTERNATIONAL WATERWAYS OF THE STRAIT OF HORMUZ AS IF IT WERE ITS OWN. WORSE, TEHRAN RESORTED TO MINING THAT NARROW STRIP.

In fact, there are those who argue that what is happening in the Middle East is not war at all. Just what it could be called is not known. Certainly, it is not a picnic. With this comes an argument that since a ceasefire has been in effect from April 7, the issue of a 60-day deadline or going to Congress does not arise. But to date, no one is even sure why the United States and Israel began it all on February 28. What started off as a bombing campaign to halt the Iranian nuclear program soon wandered into the realm of regime change. From then on, it was all hell breaking loose in the Middle East, with a widening conflict involving the Gulf nations and Iran taking steps to shut down the international waterways of the Strait of Hormuz as if it were its own. Worse, Tehran resorted to mining that narrow strip.

President Obama once remarked, "It's harder to end wars than it is to start them." He was talking about Afghanistan, but certainly his observation has relevance to what is happening in the Middle East today. President Trump has said that he is not happy with the latest proposals from Iran, which have been passed through Pakistan. Again, there is no official word on what is transpiring between the two sides. The world at large is left waiting for a mess to end quickly, one that is not only shaking up traditional regional alliances and friendships in the Middle East but also keeping the comity of nations worried about a global recession.



Opinion

Mahendra Ved

Senior Journalist and Columnist

Mamdani, the Royals, and the Weight of History

Reports from New York indicate that Zohran Mamdani "studiously avoided" ceremonially welcoming the British royals, King Charles III and Queen Camilla, expected of a New York Mayor, and that he did not ask them to give up the famed Koh-i-Noor diamond.

His distancing from the royals was linked to his father, Professor Mahmood Mamdani, a leading academic on the experience under colonialism. Zohran may also be nursing his constituency of the poor and of immigrants from the former colonized world. Although now in America to chase their dreams, they may relate to Zohran, reminded of their forefathers' experience. Mamdani is himself a child of colonialism, which his family experienced in India and Africa.

This is unlikely to be adequately appreciated in the US, which left its colonial experience behind, although some of it figured during the royal visit. But many would have wondered what would have prompted Mamdani not to press his Koh-i-Noor point with the British royals.

The oriental culture that Mamdani has inherited from his parents requires that you not embarrass or insult a visitor with a demand, whatever the point of contention. A guest is honored. The type of exchanges that King Charles had to take from President Donald Trump, his host, the body language, and the language used, would, speaking generally, be unthinkable. The British royals visited amidst very negative vibes and apprehensions back home after Trump had attacked Britain and other European allies on several occasions. He is unlikely to mellow, given the Gulf conflict's continuing, as well as his unhappiness at Europeans' unwillingness to share his self-inflicted burden. The divide on both sides of the Atlantic persists. It is debatable if the British royals' visit helped bridge that divide.

Mamdani likely decided not to press the diamond issue, suppressing his own anti-colonial instinct.

The diamond has a chequered history from the Golkonda mine in southern India to the Mughal rulers in Delhi to its being taken away by Persian invader

IF THE BRITISH AGREE TO GIVE UP, WITH TOO MANY CLAIMANTS, WHO WOULD IT GO TO? THAT HAS BEEN THE BEST BRITISH REASONING, AND IT IS DIFFICULT TO QUARREL.

Nader Shah, and then reaching Punjab's Maharajah Ranjit Singh. The East India Company ended that empire and took minor regent Daleep Singh to England.

There are differing versions. One is that the prince was coerced into presenting it to Queen Victoria. He had no choice. The other is that Lord Dalhousie gifted it to the queen. He hid it in a belt that he wore throughout his voyage back to Britain. The diamond has since remained in the Tower of London.

Mamdani would have known that during royal visits, and even without them, several governments have staked claims. It is unclear if the guests were confronted with a formal demand by any of them.

The diamond has remained in the public debate, though. In 1976, this writer followed up on the demand by Pakistan's then-prime minister Z A Bhutto with a letter addressed to the British Government. India was quick to react, though not officially and soon, it became a South Asian free-for-all. Afghanistan to Burma, all said they were part of an India when the diamond had sailed to England. Even Iran claimed it since Nader Shah had brought it, along with the peacock throne.

This is only good for a public debate. If the British agree to give up, with too many claimants, who would it go to? That has been the best British reasoning, and it is difficult to quarrel.

(Views expressed by the author do not necessarily reflect the views or positions of South Asian Herald)



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When the Game Stops Being Fun

R. Suryamurthy

What begins as entertainment often slips, almost unnoticed, into compulsion. Rohit (name changed), a 27-year-old sales executive in a Tier-II city, downloaded a gaming app during a quiet weekend. The pitch was simple: a skill-based game, quick rounds, small stakes. His first few sessions brought modest wins—just enough to make it feel easy, almost predictable. Within weeks, he was playing every night. The stakes crept up. Losses followed. He borrowed from friends, then dipped into savings meant for his sister's education.

"It felt like I was always one win away from fixing everything," he later told a counsellor.

By the time his family realized what was happening, the losses had crossed several lakh rupees—tens of thousands of dollars in purchasing power terms—and the damage was no longer just financial. Rohit had stopped sleeping properly. He avoided conversations. The game, once a distraction, had taken over his routine, his thinking, his sense of control.

His story is not unusual.

Across India, similar experiences have quietly unfolded in recent years. A college student chasing small wins between classes. A shopkeeper staying up past midnight trying to recover losses. A young parent hiding transactions from a spouse. What ties these stories together is not just money lost, but the pattern—early rewards, rising stakes, and a psychological loop that is hard to break.

It is this lived reality, repeated in millions of homes, that has pushed India to act.

The scale behind the stories

India's online gaming industry has grown into a multi-billion-dollar market, generating about \$2.8 billion in 2024 and projected to reach nearly \$3.8 billion by 2027. Much of



(Photo created with AI)

that growth has come from games involving financial stakes—formats that promise quick rewards and constant engagement.

But the same segment has also left a trail of distress. Government estimates suggest that hundreds of millions of users have been exposed to such platforms, with cumulative losses running into billions of dollars. Behind those figures are strained households, rising debt, and, in extreme cases, reports of severe psychological distress.

For policymakers, the tipping point came when these individual stories began to form a pattern too large to ignore.

A decisive regulatory turn

From May 1, the Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming Rules, 2026 come into force, giving operational strength to the Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming Act, 2025. Together, they mark a clear break from the past.

The central idea is straightforward, even blunt: any online game involving monetary stakes or

winnings is now prohibited, regardless of whether it claims to rely on skill, chance, or a mix of both. In one move, the government has ended a long-running debate and shut the door on real-money gaming formats.

The ban is sweeping. It covers not just gameplay, but advertising, promotion and even the financial rails that support such platforms. Banks and payment companies are barred from processing related transactions, while authorities retain the power to block non-compliant services under the Information Technology Act, 2000.

Penalties are designed to deter: prison terms, heavy fines, and stricter consequences for repeat violations.

A system to enforce, and to reassure

To implement this framework, the government has set up the Online Gaming Authority of India, a central body tasked with overseeing the sector.

Its role is both technical and human. On one hand, it will

classify games, determine what is permissible, and ensure compliance. On the other, it introduces a formal grievance system—something many users previously lacked. For individuals like Rohit, who felt trapped in a system with little accountability, this could mark a shift toward recognition and recourse.

The Authority will also evaluate games based on how they are structured—whether they involve stakes, how they generate revenue, and whether in-game assets can be monetized outside the platform. This determination

often designed to keep users hooked—could diminish. The digital environment, particularly for younger users, may become less predatory.

For the industry, however, the impact is more complex. Companies built around real-money gaming face an existential challenge. Some may pivot to safer formats. Others may exit or move operations overseas. In the short term, disruption is inevitable.

There are also concerns about unintended consequences. A blanket ban could push such activities underground or onto foreign

Key Pillars of the Online Gaming Rules 2026



Online Gaming Authority of India

Unified digital-first regulator for oversight and enforcement



Game Determination Framework

Classifies games as permitted or prohibited through clear criteria



Registration System

Provides digital certification for e-sports and notified games



User Safety Framework

Ensures safeguards like age checks, controls and fair play



Grievance Redressal System

Enables time-bound resolution through a two-tier mechanism



Penalties and Enforcement

Ensures compliance through digital inquiry and proportionate penalties

Source: Ministry of Electronics & IT

(Photo courtesy: PIB)

Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming Act, 2025

Protecting People, Securing India



Prevents Addiction



Protects Families



Stops Financial Fraud



Strengthens National Security

Source: Ministry of Electronics & IT

(Photo courtesy: PIB)

process, expected to take up to 90 days, effectively decides whether a game can exist legally in India.

Redefining the purpose of gaming

Importantly, the rules do not reject gaming itself. Instead, they attempt to reshape it.

Esports and casual social games—formats that do not involve monetary stakes—are encouraged. These are positioned as spaces for competition, creativity and social interaction, rather than financial risk. The government sees them as part of a broader digital economy, with potential for jobs, investment and global participation.

But the contrast is deliberate. Where one form of gaming is seen as enabling growth, the other is viewed as carrying systemic harm.

Relief, disruption and uncertainty

For families affected by compulsive gaming, the new rules may bring a sense of relief. The constant lure of high-risk platforms—

platforms, making enforcement harder. The success of the new regime will depend not just on the law itself, but on how effectively it is implemented.

A policy shaped by people

In the end, India's online gaming crackdown is not just a regulatory decision—it is a response to a social experience that has been building quietly.

For every data point about billions of dollars lost, there are countless individual moments: a late-night bet placed in hope, a bank alert ignored, a difficult conversation at home. These are the moments that have shaped policy.

What begins as entertainment does not always stay that way. And in recognizing that, the government has chosen to intervene—firmly, and perhaps belatedly.

Whether the new rules will fully resolve the problem remains to be seen. But for millions who have felt the pull of games that stopped feeling like games, they represent something tangible: a line drawn, at last, between play and harm.



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Monetizing Gold Emerges as New Wealth Strategy

In today's global economy, many Indian families possess significant amounts of gold, often passed down through generations. While gold is traditionally viewed as a store of value, it often remains an idle asset, especially for the Indian diaspora living abroad. This article explores how families can effectively monetize their gold holdings through strategic financial planning, ensuring that this valuable asset not only retains its worth but also contributes to wealth growth and lifestyle enhancement.

Gold as an Idle Asset

For many families, gold is a cherished heirloom, yet it often sits unused in lockers at home or banks. This idle status can be a missed opportunity, especially when considering the potential financial benefits of monetizing gold. Families can leverage their gold holdings to generate cash flow, which can be reinvested into a well-designed portfolio of financial assets. This approach not only keeps the gold intact but also allows families to benefit from the appreciation of gold prices while generating additional returns.

Storing and Safeguarding Gold

Storing gold comes with its own set of challenges. Bank lockers, while a common choice, involve expenses that can add up over time. Additionally, insurance limitations can pose risks; in cases of burglary or fraud, the payout may only

cover a fraction of the gold's value. Moreover, if the locker holder passes away, accessing the locker can become complicated for relatives. These factors highlight the need for a more effective strategy to safeguard and utilize gold.

The Gold Loan Model

One of the most effective ways to monetize gold is through pledging it for a gold loan. This model allows families to unlock the value of their gold without selling it outright. By taking a gold loan, families can access immediate liquidity while retaining ownership of their gold. The cash flow generated from the loan can be deployed into a diversified portfolio of financial assets, which typically yields returns of 4% to 5% higher than the cost of the gold loan.

Benefits of Gold Loans

- 1. Full Liquidity:** Families can access cash quickly without the need to sell their gold at discounted prices during urgent liquidity needs.
- 2. Tax Benefits:** The interest component of the gold loan repayment can often be set off against taxable income, providing additional financial relief.
- 3. Full Insurance:** The gold pledged for the loan is usually insured for its full value, offering peace of mind against potential losses.
- 4. Zero Locker Costs:** By monetizing gold through loans, families can eliminate the ongoing costs associated with locker rentals.

- 5. Incremental Returns:** The combination of gold price appreciation and the additional returns from financial assets can lead to a surplus of 50% to 60% in cash flows in a period of 10 years, enhancing the family's wealth and lifestyle.

Enhancing Family Wealth and Lifestyle

The strategy of monetizing gold not only preserves the physical asset but also opens up numerous opportunities for families. The cash flow generated can be used to meet various goals, such as funding children's education, investing in real estate, contributing to social causes back home, supporting dependent parents or just enhancing the family's lifestyle. Moreover, this approach ensures that the family gold can be passed down to future generations, maintaining its legacy.

The Importance of Qualified Advisors

To successfully implement a gold monetization investment strategy, it is crucial to work with a qualified financial advisor. An expert can help design, execute, and manage the strategy, ensuring that families can "have the gold and grow it too." With the right guidance, families can navigate the complexities of gold loans and investment portfolios, maximizing their financial potential.

In conclusion, monetizing family gold presents a unique opportunity for the Indian diaspora to leverage an idle asset into a powerful financial tool. By pledging gold for loans and investing the proceeds wisely, families can enhance their wealth, meet their aspirations, and secure a prosperous future for generations to come.

Regional Push for Smart Agriculture

R. Suryamurthy

A regional meet in Bangladesh this week has set the stage for a more coordinated, investment-driven approach to agriculture across South Asia, with policymakers and experts signaling that the next phase will hinge on technology adoption, climate resilience and stronger public-private partnerships.

Convened by the SAARC Agriculture Centre (SAC) along with the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) Bangladesh and the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), the Dhaka meeting brought together governments,

investors and researchers to map a forward-looking agenda for the region's farm sector.

Participants indicated that follow-up engagements are likely to focus on scaling technology-led solutions — including artificial intelligence for crop management, climate forecasting tools and data-driven supply chains — as South Asia grapples with erratic weather patterns and pressure on food systems.

H.E. Nazrul Islam Khan, addressing the gathering, flagged modernization as a priority area going forward, with Bangladesh expected to push for region-wide cooperation on agri-tech deployment

and farmer support systems. Officials suggested that climate-linked financing and cross-border knowledge sharing could become central themes in upcoming regional platforms.

Diplomatic and policy channels are also expected to deepen engagement. A.K.M. Shahidul Karim underscored the need to move from dialogue to implementation — a sentiment echoed by several delegates who indicated that the next round of cooperation would likely prioritize measurable outcomes over broad commitments.

From the SAARC Secretariat, Tanvir Ahmad Torophder pointed to expanding public-private partnerships as a key lever, with investors showing interest in scalable models in agri-logistics, cold chains and sustainable inputs. Industry participants at the meeting signaled cautious optimism, noting that clearer policy

Sri Lanka Eyes Korea Trade Boost

SAH Staff Reporter

Sri Lanka is set to intensify its trade and investment engagement with South Korea, following a high-level business outreach that underscored untapped export potential, policy reforms, and the need for stronger institutional linkages between the two economies.

The session, hosted by the Sri Lanka-Korea Business Council of the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce, brought together policymakers, trade officials, and private sector stakeholders to chart a more forward-looking roadmap for bilateral cooperation.

Participants pointed to a growing convergence of interests, with Sri Lanka seeking to diversify exports and attract investment, while South Korea looks to expand its footprint in South Asia through resilient and reform-oriented markets.

A central theme emerging from the discussions was the strategic use of the Asia-Pacific Trade Agreement, which is expected to play a more prominent role in driving Sri Lankan exports to Korea in the coming years. Officials stressed that improving awareness and compliance with APTA provisions could unlock new opportunities, particularly for small and medium enterprises aiming to enter East Asian markets.

Industry experts identified several high-potential sectors—from value-added agriculture to manufacturing and services—where Sri Lankan exporters could gain traction, provided regulatory clarity and trade facilitation measures continue to improve.

Addressing the gathering, Ambassador Miyon Lee signaled cautious optimism about Sri Lanka's economic trajectory, pointing to recent stabilization measures,

governance reforms, and anti-corruption initiatives as positive signals for foreign investors. She indicated that sustained policy consistency and an investor-friendly climate would be key to translating interest into long-term capital flows.

Looking ahead, the ambassador highlighted the importance of tariff rationalization and deeper trade integration. Efforts to streamline duties and expand free trade frameworks, she noted, would help position Sri Lanka more competitively within regional and global supply chains.

There was also renewed emphasis on accelerating trade facilitation reforms, including the rollout of a National Single Window system and adherence to global commitments under the World Trade Organization and World Intellectual Property Organization frameworks. These steps are expected to reduce transaction costs and improve ease of doing business—critical factors for export-led growth.

Sri Lanka's potential entry into the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership also featured prominently in forward-looking discussions. Stakeholders argued that joining the bloc could significantly widen market access across Asia, while reinforcing the need for parallel bilateral engagement with key member economies, including South Korea.

Business leaders said the council would continue to act as a bridge between the two countries, facilitating dialogue, partnerships, and knowledge exchange. With growing interest from exporters and investors alike, the momentum generated by the session is expected to translate into more targeted initiatives aimed at strengthening commercial ties in the months ahead.

frameworks could unlock regional capital flows.

Research bodies, including Shahidur Rashid, are expected to play a larger role in shaping policy design, particularly in tackling shared challenges such as soil degradation, water stress and market volatility. IFPRI indicated it would continue to support evidence-based interventions across multiple countries.

Nutrition and food affordability are also likely to move up the agenda. Rudaba Khondker highlighted the need to integrate nutrition goals into agricultural planning—an approach that development partners say could guide future funding models and program design.

Within SAC, officials signaled that upcoming initiatives will emphasize climate-resilient farming, livestock productivity and regional knowledge platforms. Chairing the meeting, Harunur

Rashid outlined a roadmap centered on innovation and investment partnerships, suggesting that pilot projects and cross-country collaborations may be rolled out in the coming months.

Two technical sessions held alongside the main event generated a pipeline of proposals, participants said, with stakeholders now expected to refine these into actionable programs. Observers noted that while regional coordination has historically moved slowly, the growing convergence around climate risks and food security may accelerate decision-making.

For South Asia — where agriculture remains a critical employer and economic backbone — the Dhaka meeting may mark an early pivot from discussion to delivery. The coming months will test whether that intent translates into tangible, region-wide change.

Film Review: *Ek Din* is a Lovely Film on Love

Rajiv Vijayakar

Ek *Din* is an adaptation of the 2016 Thai film, *One Day*, which had won several awards for Best Film, Best Actor and Best Actress. And I must say that the adaptation and Indianization has been excellently done. It is a lovely film, one that loses its full-est rating only because some places see a subtle but avoidable stretch of narration.

The story is about one-sided love, between Dino (Junaid Khan) and Meera (Sai Pallavi), his office colleague, but she is in love with their boss Nakul (Kunal Kapoor). Nakul's wife, Ritu (Jeniffer Emmanuel) is giving him hell, and he tells Meera that their divorce is on cards. As an incentive for surpassed targets, Nakul takes the entire staff to Japan for a trip, stating to Meera that he has chosen the place only for her (she has been a fan of Japan since her late father initiated her into the charms), and that they will have two extra days all by themselves later.

At a Wishing Bell in a Japanese shrine, a forlorn Dino wishes for just one day with his love. His wish is granted in a unique manner: Nakul's lie is exposed, his wife pregnant, and a heartbroken Meera has an accident in an inebriated condition. This leads to a rare medical condition, Transient Global Amnesia, a temporary episode of severe memory loss, lasting up to 24 hours, where the person cannot form new memories and also forgets the immediate past.

Dino has also stayed back when he sees Meera's condition and he gets to spend the

best day of his life with her, who also has such a great time that she finds she is in love with him, without knowing who he is actually. But what happens when things come back to normal just a day later?

Sai Pallavi as Meera is a tower of talent and a perfect piece of casting. Junaid Khan is excellent as the nerdy Dino, who no one notices as a person but only as a professional computer technician. The supporting cast is apt, with Pragati Mishra as Meera's roommate making a special mark.

The script and dialogues (Sneha Desai with Spandan Mishra) are outstanding, and Sunil Pandey's direction is commendably in sync with this unique yet heartwarming story. A special word for Manoj Lobo's stunning camerawork. Even an *Ek Din* with the Japanese locales like walks, snow-clad mountains and terrains, festivals and fairs is nothing short of hypnotizing.

The music (Ram Sampath) is excellent but not showy. It is *situational*, not generic, with lovely lyrics (Irshad Kamil) and attractive simple tunes that are well-sung. There is no item song, nothing mediocre or pedestrian in the lyrics, orchestration or compositions.

Rating: ****1/2

Aamir Khan Productions' Ek Din Produced by: Aamir Khan, Mansoor Khan & Aparna Purohit Directed by: Sunil Pandey Written By: Sneha Desai & Spandan Mishra from a story by Banjong Pisanthanakun Music: Ram Sampath Starring: Junaid Khan, Sai Pallavi, Kunal Kapoor, Pragati Mishra, Kavin Dave & others

Entertainment Round Up

Peddi June Release

Ram Charan's upcoming film *Peddi*, directed by Buchi Babu Sana, is officially set to hit cinemas on June 4.

"*Peddi*" is tipped to be one of the biggest films of the year, starring global star Ram Charan in the lead role. Its music is composed by A.R. Rahman. Produced under the Vriddhi Cinemas banner, the film has now officially locked June 4 as its theatrical release date, strategically positioned just after the IPL season.



(Photo courtesy: x@Ram Charan)

Penned by Sana, "*Peddi*" also features Shiva Rajkumar, Janhvi Kapoor, Divyendu Sharma and Jagapathi Babu. Mounted by Venkat Sathish Kilaru under his banner, Vriddhi Cinemas and renowned production house Myshri Movie Makers. (UNI)

Pralay Shoot August

Bollywood star Ranveer Singh is set to begin shooting for "*Pralay*" in August 2026, with the ambitious post-apocalyptic thriller now firmly on track despite recent speculation around delays.

After the record-breaking success of the "*Dhurandhar*" franchise, all eyes are now on Singh's next film. He has already given his nod to director Jay Mehta's post-apocalyptic thriller "*Pralay*." Although some reports claimed that the film has been stalled due to "creative differences" between Singh and the director,


a source close to the production house dismissed these reports and clarified that the movie is completely on track and its shooting is set to commence in August 2026.

The source said, "Reports of any uncertainty surrounding the film '*Pralay*' are completely baseless. Ranveer and Jay are in constant discussions, and the script has been finalized. The film is now in the pre-production stage, and the entire team is preparing to create a grand scale never before seen in Indian cinema. As per the current plan, '*Pralay*' will go on floors in August 2026."



(Photo courtesy: x@Ranveer Singh)

The film is said to be a large-scale, VFX-heavy action thriller set in a post-apocalyptic and dystopian world. '*Pralay*' will present the zombie genre in a completely different way than ever before in Hindi cinema. (UNI)




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Beyond the Mat

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A Rainbow Without Colors



(Photo created with AI)

What happens when you strip a rainbow of its colors? It turns dull - its very existence is threatened. Your breath works the same way. Deny your body its prana and the decline is slow, silent and often invisible until it shows up as stress disorders, hypertension, sleep issues or chronic inflammation.

This is a silent epidemic of our time - not because breath is missing, but because we are doing it wrong.

nervous system work harder than they should.

So how do you make sure you're not part of that 80 percent?

Sit comfortably, breathe normally and count your breaths for one minute - no performance, no correction, just noticing. If the number is high, try a simple CO₂-building breath hold. Exhale softly. Pinch your nose and hold your breath. Stay there until you feel the first clear wave of air hunger - the moment your body gently

A HEALTHY HUMAN LUNG HOLDS ABOUT 6-7 LITERS, TAKES ROUGHLY 25,000 BREATHS A DAY AND FILTERS CLOSE TO 10,000 LITERS OF AIR. SCIENCE SAYS A NORMAL BREATHING RATE IS 12-20 BREATHS PER MINUTE. YOGA PLACES IT AROUND 15.

A healthy human lung holds about 6-7 liters, takes roughly 25,000 breaths a day and filters close to 10,000 liters of air. Science says a normal breathing rate is 12-20 breaths per minute. Yoga places it around 15.

Most people today breathe 20 to 25 times a minute. That is far higher than what the body is built for. Stress, mouth breathing, poor posture and even softer modern diets push us into fast, shallow breaths without us noticing. The effects are widespread. Studies suggest up to 80 percent of adults now breathe inefficiently. This lowers oxygen use, raises anxiety, disrupts sleep and makes the heart and

asks for air, not a point of strain. When that urge arrives, release your fingers and take a slow, easy nasal inhale. With a few relaxed rounds, your system starts to adjust. The body learns that a small rise in carbon dioxide is safe and over time this shift breathing from fast and shallow to slower, steadier and more efficient.

Because you don't want to strip the rainbow of its colors. Your prana is your life force - learn to harness it and watch your health return in full spectrum.

(Views expressed by the author do not necessarily reflect the views or positions of South Asian Herald)



Beauty Basics with Shahnaz Husain

Contact on Instagram @shahnazhusain_official

Skin tan during Summers

Tired of your skin getting darker every time you step into the sun? You're not alone.

The scorching summer heat brings more than just rising temperatures. For many, the most visible impact is uneven skin tone and dark patches on the skin. Skin tan is the skin's natural way to act as a defense mechanism against UV radiation, primarily from the sun.

When your skin is exposed to UVA and UVB rays, the melanocytes in the skin produce melanin, the pigment responsible for the color of skin, hair and eyes. This pigment absorbs the radiation to prevent further DNA damage. However, excessive sun exposure can lead to an overproduction of melanin, resulting in a tan that can lead to premature ageing and increase the risk of skin cancer.

While a sun tan will fade naturally over time as your body goes through its normal cycle of shedding dead skin cells, playing the waiting game can be incredibly frustrating.

With the right skincare routine, sun protection habits, and science-backed natural ingredients treatments, you can effectively reduce tanning and prevent long-term skin damage.

Here is how you can shed that summer tan safely and naturally.

Yogurt

Yogurt is an effective natural remedy for removing sun tans due to its high lactic acid content, which acts as a gentle exfoliant, breaks down dead skin cells, and brightens the complexion.

Applying plain curd directly to the affected areas helps reduce tan and cool the complexion.

It also soothes sun-exposed skin, hydrates to restore a natural glow, and reduces pigmentation. The probiotics in yogurt calm the skin by promoting cell renewal and repairing the lipid barrier in dehydrated skin.

- Mix 2 tablespoons of yogurt with a pinch of turmeric. Apply evenly and leave for 20

minutes. Rinse with lukewarm water. Use 3 times a week for a natural glow

Lemon and Honey Mask

1. Lemon acts as a natural exfoliant, while honey hydrates the skin. Mix equal parts lemon juice and honey, apply for 15-20 minutes, and rinse with lukewarm water 2-3 times a week. Lemon will gently exfoliate the skin, and honey retains the moisture.
2. Mix 1 teaspoon of lemon juice, 1 teaspoon of honey and 1 tablespoon of yogurt to make a smooth paste of equal consistency.
3. Apply the mixture evenly to the face, neck and open area. Leave it on for 15-20 minutes. Wash off with cool water.
4. Avoid using lemon on sensitive, broken, or inflamed skin. Do not apply lemon before direct sun exposure

Cucumber Juice

1. Cucumber has 98% water content, which means that it is quite helpful when it comes to hydrating your skin.
2. It soothes the skin and helps brighten the complexion.
3. The astringent property in cucumber not only helps in reducing skin tan but also gives a fresh glow to the face.
4. Regular application helps rejuvenate sun-exposed skin and restore its natural glow.
5. Simply blend a fresh cucumber, apply the juice to your face, and leave it on for around 15-20 minutes. It will soothe sun-exposed skin while keeping the routine easy.
6. Peel the skin and grate 1 cucumber in a bowl. Squeeze all the water out. Apply it all over your face with your hands or a cotton pad. Let it sit for 20 mins before washing it off
7. Cucumber juice (or pulp) and watermelon can be mixed with two teaspoons of powdered milk. Put the ingredients in a blender for a smooth paste. Apply to the face and neck and rinse off with water after half an hour.

- Mix the cucumber and ripe papaya pulp with curd and two teaspoons of oats. Lemon juice can also be added. Apply to the face and neck twice a week. Wash it off after half an hour.

- Add a little turmeric (haldi) to gram flour (besan) and curd into a paste and apply daily. Wash it off after 20 to 30 minutes.

- Mix one teaspoon each of honey and orange juice with egg white. Apply to the face and wash off after 20 minutes. It removes tan and also nourishes the skin, making it soft and smooth.

- Add cream of milk, a pinch of turmeric, and oats to the tomato pulp and half a teaspoon of honey. Apply to the face to remove tan and nourish the skin.

- Mix ground almonds with curd and a pinch of turmeric. Apply to the face. After 15 minutes, rub gently with circular movements. Wash it off with water.

- Mix two teaspoons of honey, a little milk, and rose water, dried and powdered lemon peels into a paste. Apply two or three times a week on the face and neck. Wash it off after 20 minutes.

- Soak one tablespoon of moong dal in water for a few hours. Make a paste and add one tablespoon of tomato pulp. Apply to the face with a light massage. Wash off with water after 20 minutes.

- Take one tablespoon of choker (wheat bran), one teaspoon of each orange peel powder and curd, and one tablespoon of aloe vera gel. Mix and apply to the skin, washing it off after 30 minutes.

The author is an international fame beauty expert and is called herbal queen of India.

(Views expressed by the author do not necessarily reflect the views or positions of South Asian Herald)



Weekly Horoscope

MAY 08-14

BY ASTROLOGER MANISHA KUSHIK

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(Photo: tongstocker1987 / Freepik)

ARIES (Mar 21–Apr 20)



Love: Five of Swords

Mood: The Chariot

Career: Ten of Coins

Financial matters may take precedence, with chances of gains improving your sense of stability. Professional responsibilities may increase, encouraging long-term planning. Family interactions may feel warm, though emotional expression may need attention. Romance may remain low-key for now, but temporary. Travel ideas may begin to take shape. Lucky Number: 4 • Lucky Color: Dark Slate Grey

TAURUS (Apr 21–May 20)



Love: Wheel of Fortune

Mood: The Sun

Career: Eight of Cups

Health and vitality may remain strong, helping you stay productive. Financial prospects look promising with chances of steady inflow. Career decisions may involve reassessment or change. Family bonding may deepen, bringing emotional comfort. Romantic life may feel fulfilling and expressive. Short travel plans may bring joy and refreshment. Lucky Number: 6 • Lucky Color: Magenta

GEMINI (May 21–Jun 21)



Love: Two of Coins

Mood: The Fool

Career: The Magician

New opportunities may emerge, encouraging fresh perspectives in professional life. Financial stability may improve gradually. Family support may remain reassuring, helping you stay balanced. Romance may feel light yet meaningful. Travel or social outings may uplift your mood. Academically, curiosity may lead to productive learning experiences. Lucky Number: 7 • Lucky Color: Brown

CANCER (Jun 22–Jul 22)



Love: The Empress

Mood: King of Coins

Career: Page of Wands

Career developments may bring new learning opportunities, though progress may remain steady. Financial matters may support savings and planning. Family interactions may need patience and calm communication. Romantic moments may feel affectionate and nurturing. Creative pursuits may flourish, and property matters may show gradual improvement. Lucky Number: 22 • Lucky Color: Dark Blue

LEO (Jul 23–Aug 23)



Love: The Hermit

Mood: Seven of Wands

Career: The Tower

Personal growth may take center stage, encouraging self-reflection and clarity. Financial stability

may bring comfort, though careful planning remains important. Professional changes may arise unexpectedly, requiring adaptability. Family support may remain strong. Romance may deepen through meaningful conversations. Academic or analytical work may show positive results. Lucky Number: 9 • Lucky Color: Silver

VIRGO (Aug 24–Sept 23)



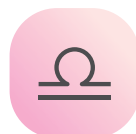
Love: Ace of Wands

Mood: The Hanged Man

Career: The Fool

Travel opportunities may bring a refreshing change, helping you recharge mentally. Financial caution may be necessary while handling expenses. Career progress may feel slow, yet persistence may lead to gradual improvement. Family life may remain peaceful. Romantic connections may feel supportive, while academic efforts may strengthen through discipline. Lucky Number: 17 • Lucky Color: Orange

LIBRA (Sept 24–Oct 23)



Love: Two of Wands

Mood: Three of Coins

Career: Devil

Professional growth may offer chances to showcase your skills. Financial matters may remain balanced with thoughtful decisions. Family dynamics may require patience to maintain harmony. Romance may feel warm and emotionally engaging. Travel plans may face minor changes. Social interactions may bring satisfaction and a sense of achievement. Lucky Number: 1 • Lucky Color: Golden

SCORPIO (Oct 24–Nov 22)



Love: The Fool

Mood: Eight of Coins

Career: Three of Swords

Work commitments may demand focus and consistency for desired outcomes. Financial improvement may come through smart utilization of resources. Family matters may require understanding and patience. Romance may feel lively and spontaneous. Travel plans may bring pleasant experiences. Academic pursuits may benefit from structured efforts. Lucky Number: 22 • Lucky Color: Saffron

SAGITTARIUS (Nov 23–Dec 21)



Love: The Empress

Mood: The Moon

Career: Ace of Swords

Career growth may remain promising, with chances to take important decisions. Financial planning may strengthen your stability. Health may support productivity. Family harmony may bring emotional ease. Romance may feel subdued, requiring patience. Travel opportunities may bring excitement, while academic efforts may require focus and consistency. Lucky Number: 3 • Lucky Color: Off-White

CAPRICORN (Dec 22–Jan 21)



Love: Two of Swords

Mood: The High Priestess

Career: Two of Coins

Financial opportunities may appear favorable, supporting long-term gains. Career matters may require balance and thoughtful decisions. Family connections may grow stronger, bringing warmth. Romantic life may feel emotionally steady. Travel plans may unfold smoothly. Property matters may progress gradually, while academic achievements may bring recognition. Lucky Number: 4 • Lucky Color: Peach

AQUARIUS (Jan 22–Feb 19)



Love: The Hierophant

Mood: King of Wands

Career: Page of Cups

Health may remain stable, encouraging consistent routines. Financial discipline may help you

manage resources effectively. Professional opportunities may arise, bringing recognition. Family situations may need a compassionate approach. Romance may feel meaningful and comforting. Travel or short breaks may uplift your mood and energy. Lucky Number: 2 • Lucky Color: Yellow

PISCES (Feb 20–Mar 20)

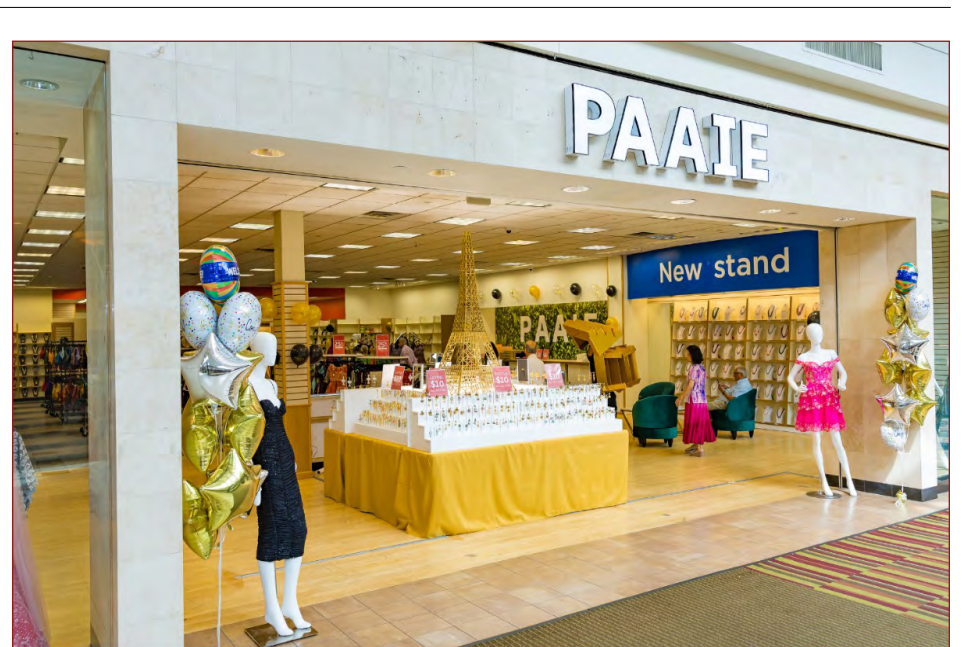


Love: The Star

Mood: Judgement

Career: The Magician

Financial improvement may bring confidence, especially in business or investments. Professional life may remain demanding but rewarding. Family support may help you stay grounded. Romance may require effort to maintain balance. Travel plans may bring enjoyable moments. Property matters may show growth, while learning opportunities may enhance progress. Lucky Number: 9 • Lucky Color: Pink



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Travel

Experience Arizona's Scenic Verde Canyon Railroad

Lina Shah

A journey through Arizona's Verde Valley is like stepping into a living canvas, where dramatic red-rock formations, lush riverbanks, and centuries of history come together in perfect harmony.

Our recent visit to Scottsdale, Sedona, and the breathtaking Verde Valley region revealed a side of the American Southwest that is as culturally rich as it is visually stunning. Nestled between the Coconino National Forest and Prescott National Forest, this area offers an immersive blend of Native American heritage, artistic vibrancy, and unspoiled natural beauty.



(Photo Courtesy: Lina Shah)

To truly experience the essence of the valley, we embarked on a scenic journey aboard the Verde Canyon Railroad, an experience that proved to be the highlight of our trip. With over a century of history, this beautifully restored railroad combines vintage charm with modern comfort, offering a seamless blend of nostalgia and luxury.

Our 40-mile round-trip adventure began in Clarkdale, winding through some of Arizona's most spectacular landscapes. Towering red cliffs, verdant greenery, and the gently flowing Verde River created a constantly evolving panorama that felt almost cinematic. Every moment on the train was a front-row seat to nature's grandeur.

The rail depot itself is a destination worth exploring. Guests can browse the charming Boxcar Gift Store, delve into local history at the John Bell Museum, or enjoy a casual meal at the on-site café, which offers everything from hearty burgers to fresh salads. A relaxed outdoor pavilion provided the perfect setting for our pre-boarding lunch, adding to the leisurely pace of the day.

We traveled in the Cottonwood Coach, one of the train's thoughtfully designed cars that cater to a range of preferences. Whether enjoying the comfort of climate-controlled interiors with plush seating and attentive beverage service or stepping into the open-air viewing cars to feel the breeze and take in uninterrupted views, every detail is curated for a memorable experience.

A complimentary welcome drink and a beautifully arranged charcuterie tray, complete with gourmet cheeses, crackers, fresh fruit, and dessert, set a refined tone for the journey.

What truly elevated the experience was engaging onboard narration. Our host shared fascinating insights into the region's geology, archaeology, and history, bringing the landscape to life in meaningful ways. Along the route, we were fortunate to spot wildlife near the riverbanks, adding an element of surprise and delight to the trip.

For travelers seeking a unique and enriching way to explore Arizona's scenic wilderness, the Verde Canyon Railroad offers an unforgettable escape. It is more than just a train ride, it is a moving window into the soul of the Southwest, where every turn reveals a new story waiting to be discovered.

(Views expressed by the author do not necessarily reflect the views or positions of South Asian Herald)

From Kalari to Chhurpi: India's Cheese Story Finds Global Voice

SAH Staff Reporter

Two Indian cheese brands winning top honors at an international competition in Brazil may appear, at first glance, like a small culinary victory. But the recognition, highlighted by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his latest Mann Ki Baat address, points to something far larger: the quiet rise of India as a serious player in the global cheese landscape.

For decades, India's dairy identity has been overwhelmingly tied to milk, ghee, and paneer. Cheese—at least in the global, artisanal sense—rarely featured in that narrative. Yet beneath the surface, a vast and largely undocumented tradition of indigenous cheeses has existed for generations, shaped by geography, climate, and community practices.

Today, that diversity is beginning to find both voice and value.

Take Kalari, a ripened cheese from Jammu and Kashmir, often described as the "Mozzarella of Kashmir." Traditionally made by the Gujjar-Bakarwal community, it has long been a staple in local diets, pan-fried and served with bread. Now, it is being rediscovered by chefs and entrepreneurs who see in it not just nostalgia, but export potential. Travel east to the high-altitude regions

of Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, and Ladakh, and Chhurpi tells a different story. Made from yak milk, it is among the hardest cheeses in the world, sometimes chewed for hours. Its long shelf life and high protein content are now attracting niche global markets, particularly in health and adventure food segments.

In western India, Topli Nu Paneer—also known as Surti cheese—reflects a more subtle craft tradition. Steamed in baskets and lightly fermented, it carries a delicate flavor that is now being reintroduced to urban consumers through boutique dairy brands.

These are not isolated examples. From the Himalayan belt to coastal regions, India hosts a spectrum of cheeses that remain largely underexplored. What is changing now is the ecosystem around them.

Driven by rising incomes, shifting food preferences, and exposure to global cuisines, demand for cheese in India is expanding rapidly. More importantly, producers are moving beyond mass-market processed cheese to focus on artisanal, region-specific varieties. Investments in cold chains, better packaging, and food safety compliance are helping these products travel further—both within India and abroad.

The international recognition in

Brazil underscores this transition. It signals that Indian cheese is no longer confined to local markets or diaspora nostalgia; it is being judged—and appreciated—on global standards.

The government has also been nudging this shift by encouraging value addition in the dairy sector. Instead of exporting raw or minimally processed products, there is a growing emphasis on building brands rooted in India's culinary heritage. Cheese, with its strong linkage to terroir and tradition, fits naturally into this vision.

Yet challenges remain. Scaling up production without losing authenticity, ensuring consistent quality, and building consumer awareness are all hurdles that the sector must navigate. Unlike Europe, where cheese traditions are codified and protected, India's cheese heritage is still scattered, often undocumented, and vulnerable to dilution. That, perhaps, is also its strength.

In an era where global consumers are seeking authenticity and unique food experiences, India's cheese story offers both. It is not a single narrative, but a mosaic—of communities, climates, and craft techniques.

The awards in Brazil may have provided a moment of recognition. The larger opportunity lies ahead: in turning that recognition into a sustained global presence.

If that happens, Indian cheese could well move from being a curiosity to a category—one that carries with it not just flavor, but a deeper story of place, people, and possibility.

An Outsider's Guide to Cricket

K.S. Palachandran

An American, Richards, arrived at an India office to review the progress of a World Bank-supported project. With his schedule clear on a Sunday, he was keen to see something out of the ordinary. His colleague, Das, readily offered to show him around.



(Photo created with AI)

"Have you heard of cricket?" Das asked.

"Cricket?" Richards replied, puzzled. "You mean the insect? How can insects play a game? Is it something like cockfighting?"

Das laughed and promised to show him the real thing.

They soon entered a sprawling stadium. Richards looked around in astonishment. The sheer size of the venue left him wondering how anyone could possibly watch insects from so far away. The spectacle itself seemed baffling even before it began.

The ritual started with three men walking onto the field, tossing a coin, exchanging a quick handshake, and exiting. Then came two men dressed in black, followed by players clad in white. At the center lay a neatly trimmed rectangular patch of grass, with three sticks planted upright at each end.

Richards watched closely as the men in black placed small wooden pieces on top of the sticks. One of them produced a red ball.

"What is happening?" he asked. "When do the crickets appear? And those sticks—are they part of the fight?"

Das, struggling to contain his amusement, began explaining. The central strip was the "pitch," the sticks formed the "wicket," and the men in black were "umpires." The small pieces were "bails." The red ball, he added, would be bowled toward a player who would attempt to strike it.

Just then, two players entered wearing elaborate protective gear—pads on their legs, gloves on their hands, and helmets on their heads. Each carried a polished wooden bat.

"They look ready for combat," Richards observed.

"They're batsmen," Das replied, "and the bat is used to hit the ball—not unlike baseball, though far more nuanced."

Behind the wicket stood another padded player with large gloves—the wicketkeeper. Meanwhile, one umpire positioned himself behind the stumps, and the other stood off to the side.

Das pointed to the white markings on the pitch. "That's the crease. The bowler must not cross it while delivering the ball."

Richards listened, but the details seemed to multiply faster than he could process them. The explanation grew more intricate as Das described the rules, formats, and strategies—complex enough to confuse even seasoned viewers. Then came the fielding positions. Das rattled them off: slips, gully, leg slip, backward short leg. As if that weren't enough, he added more—silly point, cover, extra cover, long off, long on, square leg, third man, mid-on, mid-off.

Richards paused, overwhelmed. The names alone were enough to make his head spin. He wondered aloud whether the players moved according to these peculiar titles.

After a moment of silence, he let out a laugh. "So, it's like baseball—but far more complicated. I suppose that explains why it's English."

He added with a grin, "We Americans must have simplified things when we created baseball. Even our football isn't quite like English soccer, and rugby, too, has its own twists."

Still bemused but entertained, Richards left the stadium with Das, carrying with him a lasting impression of a game as fascinating as it was confounding.

India Names Squad for Lord's Test



Lord's Cricket Ground in London which will host its first Women's Test between England and India from July 10-13, 2026.
(Photo courtesy: Anirudh Nair, SAH)

Anirudh Nair

India has announced its squad for the historic one-off Test at Lord's Cricket Ground against England. This will be the first Women's Test match to be played at the 'Home of Cricket' and will take place after the ICC Women's T20 World Cup, which is also being held in England.

India's previous Test match was against Australia in March, where it was defeated by ten wickets. From that game, India has made a couple of changes, with uncapped Nandini Sharma being the most notable addition. She has also been included in the squad for the T20 World Cup.

Sharma's inclusion is largely backed by her outstanding debut season in the WPL with the Delhi Capitals, where she picked up 17 wickets in ten games. Also included from the Capitals is spinner Sree Charani, who,

despite being a prominent presence in limited-overs formats for India, is yet to make her Test debut. Charani has a strong track record in England, having taken 13 wickets during India's tour of England in 2025 and winning the Player of the Series award in the T20Is.

It is remarkable that in Lord's Cricket Ground's storied history of more than two centuries, no Women's Test has been played at the famed venue. However, with the rise of the women's game over the past decade, the time is right to create history, and the Indian players are more than delighted to be part of it.

"I am very excited. As a cricketer, it is a dream to play a Test match at Lord's," said Indian captain Harmanpreet Kaur at the squad announcement press conference.

"That dream is going to be fulfilled. We are going with a positive mindset." Indian opener Pratika Rawal also

shared her excitement, hoping to etch her name onto Lord's prestigious honors board, which features many other Indian legends.

"I think it's such a beautiful format," said Rawal about Test cricket in an interview with PTI.

"I'm definitely really excited for that Test match. I crave that format a lot. I'm preparing well, putting in the hard work for that preparation."

India will play England in the historic Test at Lord's Cricket Ground from July 10 to 13.

INDIA'S SQUAD

Harmanpreet Kaur [C], Smriti Mandhana [VC], Shafali Varma, Jemimah Rodrigues, Pratika Rawal, Deepti Sharma, Richa Ghosh (WK), Sree Charani, Yastika Bhatia (WK), Nandini Sharma, Harleen Deol, Renuka Thakur, Kranti Gaud, Sayali Satghare, Sneha Rana

Mittal Buys Rajasthan Royals for \$1.65 Billion

In one of the biggest ownership shake-ups in Indian Premier League history, UK-based Indian-origin steel magnate Lakshmi Mittal has led a consortium to acquire the Rajasthan Royals franchise in a \$1.65

billion (around Rs 15,660 crore) deal.

Mittal confirmed that a definitive agreement has been reached to take over the Jaipur-based franchise, one of the original IPL teams. The consortium includes Serum Institute of India chief Adar Poonawalla and outgoing lead owner Manoj Badale, who will continue in a supporting role.

As per the agreed structure, the Mittal Family will hold a controlling 75 per cent stake in the franchise. Poonawalla will own 18 per cent, while the remaining 7 per cent will stay with existing investors, including Badale.

The acquisition also covers the franchise's global properties, including Paarl

Royals in South Africa and Barbados Royals in the Caribbean, expanding the group's international cricket footprint.

The announcement comes as a surprise, with earlier reports suggesting a US-based consortium led by Kal Somani, along with partners such as Rob Walton and Ford family representatives, was close to finalizing the deal.

The transaction is still subject to approvals from the BCCI, Competition Commission of India (CCI), IPL Governing Council, and other regulatory authorities. Completion is expected in the third quarter of 2026.

Mittal said his Rajasthan roots made the acquisition personally significant, adding that he looks forward to engaging with the franchise and its supporters. Poonawalla said the team has a strong legacy and long-term growth potential.

Manoj Badale said the new ownership brings continuity and ambition, while confirming his ongoing association with the franchise in an advisory capacity.

The deal marks one of the most high-value franchise acquisitions in IPL history, underlining the league's growing global commercial appeal. (UNI)

Sports Round Up

Kashmir Camp Draws Hundreds

A free three-day cricket coaching camp launched at Harinambal Cricket Ground in Srinagar, attracted hundreds of aspiring cricketers from various age groups, highlighting the growing enthusiasm for the sport in the region.

The initiative, launched by the Zephyr Cricket Academy, aims to provide structured training and professional guidance to young cricketers, focusing on the development of core skills including batting, bowling, fielding, and overall match awareness, the organizers said.

Eminent ace cricketer of Jammu & Kashmir and former Ranji Trophy captain and a BCCI Level-2 certified coach, Samiullah Beigh is leading the camp. He shared valuable insights on modern techniques, discipline, and game temperament, inspiring participants to pursue excellence in cricket.

The camp is further being enriched by experienced former first-class cricketers, including Omar Alam, Mehrajuddin Dar, and Mani Sharma, who are actively engaging with players and providing expert guidance.

The sessions are designed to ensure holistic development, combining technical drills, fitness routines, and practical match scenarios. The academy has emphasized accessibility by offering the camp free of cost, thereby encouraging wider participation and nurturing grassroots talent. (UNI)

Jharkhand T20 Launch

Jharkhand will host its first franchise-based professional T20 cricket league, with the inaugural season likely to begin in the first week of June, officials said.

The Jharkhand State Cricket Association has authorized SJ Uplift to operate the league under a seven-year agreement, introducing a franchise model in the state's cricket structure.

The first season is expected to feature six men's teams. A women's competition with three teams will also be organized alongside.

Matches will be open to spectators free of cost. Player selection will be conducted through an auction and bidding process aimed at ensuring transparency and competitiveness.

JSCA president Ajaynath Shahdeo said the initiative would help strengthen the cricketing ecosystem in the state and provide players opportunities to progress to higher levels.

SJ Uplift founder Sambhav Jain said the objective is to build a professional league structure for long-term development of the sport. (UNI)

Colts Set for Asia Cup

India U17 men's national team head coach Bibiano Fernandes, on Friday named the 23-member squad for AFC U17 Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2026.

India have been drawn in Group D, alongside Australia and Uzbekistan. The fourth team in the group, Republic of Korea, have withdrawn from the tournament, making it a three-team group. Bibiano's boys play Australia on May 6, and Uzbekistan on May 10.

The top two teams from the group will progress to the quarter-finals, which also ensures qualification for the FIFA U17 World Cup Qatar 2026.

India's squad for the AFC U17 Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2026:

Goalkeepers: Alok Nishad, Manashjyoti Baruah, Rajrup Sarkar.

Defenders: Abhishek Kumar Mondal, Indra Rana Magar, Korou Meitei Konthoujam, Lawmsangzuala, Lesvin Rebelo, Md Aimaan Bin, Shubham Poonia.

Midfielders: Dallalmuon Gangte, Denny Singh Wangkhem, Diamond Singh Thokchom, Moosa Ashiq Sofi, Nitishkumar Meitei Yengkhom.

Forwards: Adil Aman A, Azlaan Shah Kh, Gunleiba Wangkheirakpam, Heeranganba Seram, Rahan Ahmed, Raj Singh Wahengbam, Washington Singh Ngangom, Yuvraj Kadam.

Head Coach: Bibiano Fernandes. (UNI)



(Photo courtesy: X@Rajasthan Royals)