QUEENSLAND'S SMALL BUSINESSES PASS THE 500,000 MARK

Community • Business • Entertainment

THE Indian Sun PLUS

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QUEENSLAND

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UNITY CUP UNITES CULTURES

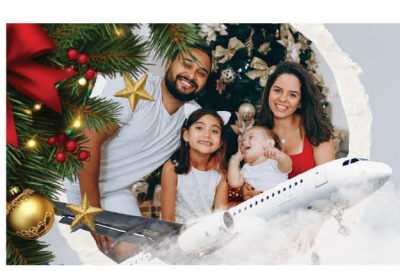
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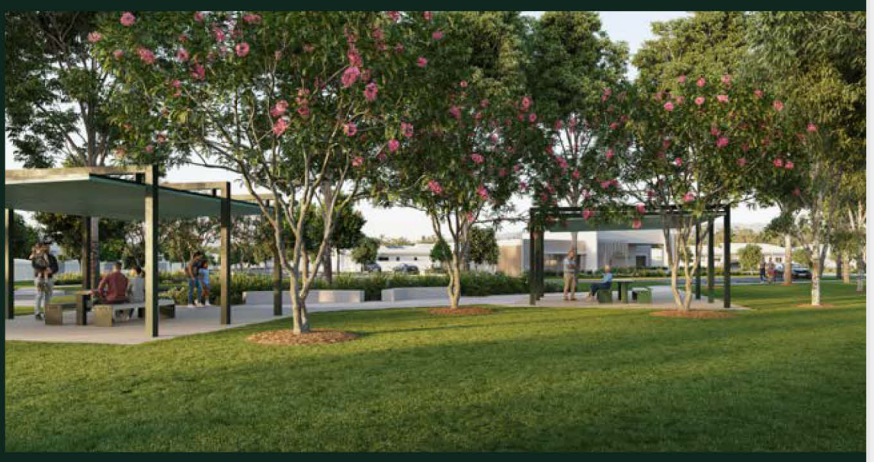
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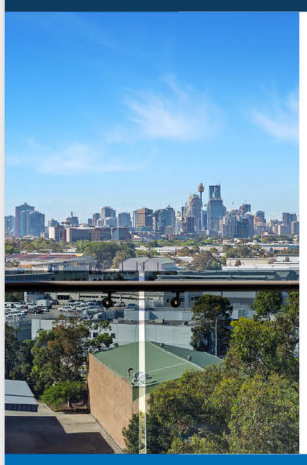


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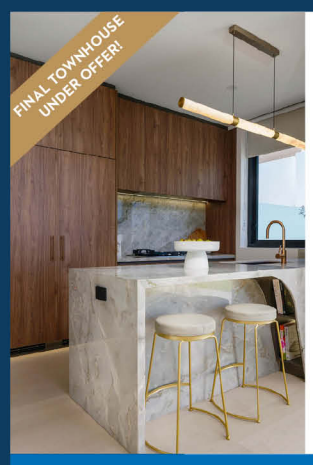


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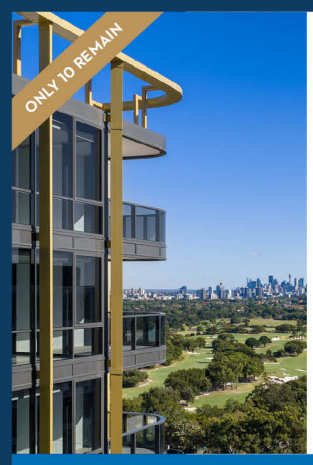


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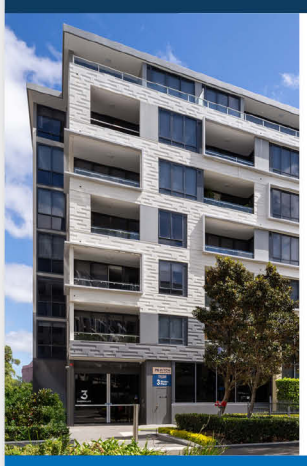


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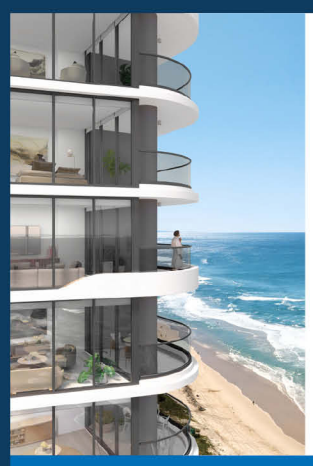


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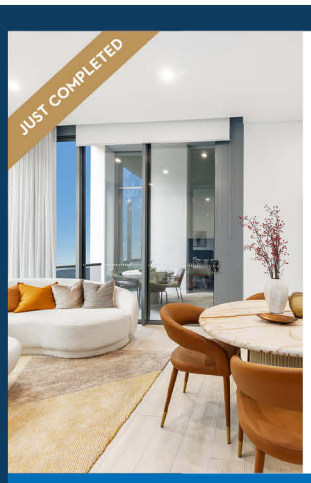
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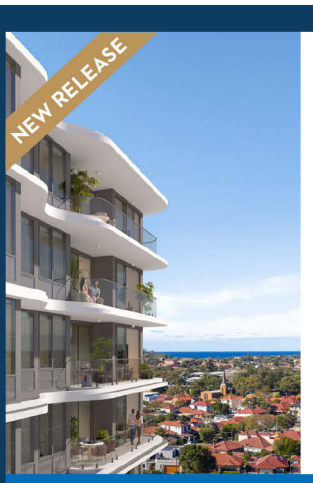
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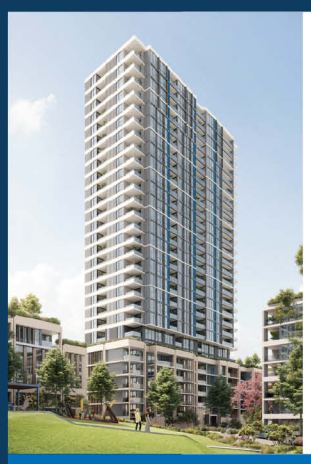
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EDITOR'S NOTE

India-Australia Ties Flourish Through Community, Culture and Cricket

Dear Readers,



This month's edition presents a vibrant collection of stories that collectively illustrate the deepening and diversifying connections between India and Australia, moving far beyond traditional diplomacy into the rich realm of community, culture, and shared human experience. From Far North Queensland to festival stages, a compelling narrative emerges of partnership forged through genuine engagement.

Our report from Cairns sets a powerful tone. The official visit by High Commissioner Gopal Baglay and Consul General Neetu Bhagotia, facilitated by GOPIO Cairns Inc., was noteworthy not merely as a diplomatic engagement but for its profound community-centric focus. The "highly productive" sessions in Cairns underscore a significant evolution in bilateral ties: the recognition that the relationship's strength is built from the ground up by its people. The visit's itinerary—spanning formal consultations, a poignant stop at the Gurudwara Sahib to observe the spirit of seva, and the acknowledgement of local achievers—perfectly encapsulates the holistic nature of this modern partnership. It is one where faith, culture, professional contribution, and social harmony are interwoven, strengthening the fabric of both multicultural Australia and its relationship with India.

This theme of grassroots cultural exchange finds a direct echo in our second story, announcing the Namaste India Festival in Brisbane. Slated for 25 January, this interactive, workshop-based event democratises cultural exploration. By allowing attendees to shape their own journey through Indian arts, the Consulate General is fostering a deeper, more personal form of engagement than a passive performance could achieve. It is a smart, contemporary approach to cultural diplomacy, prioritising participation and hands-on learning to build tangible understanding.

Simultaneously on that same date, as detailed in our third report, Cairns will witness a dynamic fusion of sport, charity, and national celebration. The FNQ Unity Cricket Cup 2026 cleverly coincides with both Australia Day and India's Republic Day, using cricket—a shared passion—as the pitch upon which broader community values are played out. The event's design, incorporating multicultural food, performance, and family activities alongside competitive sport, transforms a tournament into a civic space. Crucially, its humanitarian aim to raise funds for Sri Lanka Flood Relief demonstrates how local community initiatives in Australia can resonate with global solidarity, embodying a compassionate, outward-looking ethos.

Finally, our interview with Thaikkudam Bridge offers a thrilling preview of the artistic energy soon to cross the Indian Ocean. The band's excitement for their Adelaide Fringe debut and their evolution into a "completely different" sonic entity symbolises the dynamic, ever-refreshing nature of India's cultural exports. Their collaborative, genre-defying creativity—born from WhatsApp chats and solidified on stage—mirrors the improvisational and adaptive spirit seen in the community events above. As bassist Vian Fernandes notes, the conductor is ultimately the crowd's energy, a truth that applies equally to successful diplomacy and cultural exchange. Their tour is a potent reminder that people-to-people connections are, at their best, a two-way conversation of immense vitality.

Together, these stories reveal a multi-channel dialogue. It is conducted through diplomatic consultations over shared priorities, through the joyful noise of a festival workshop, through the competitive camaraderie of a community cricket match, and through the innovative chords of a fusion band. This is the living, breathing architecture of the India-Australia relationship today: built not just on government frameworks but on the enduring pillars of community spirit, cultural curiosity, and collaborative goodwill.

Best wishes,
NICK ATTAM
Editor, The Indian Sun—Queensland

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India's High Commissioner meets Far North Queensland community in Cairns visit

***NICK ATTAM** CAIRNS*
@the_indian_sun

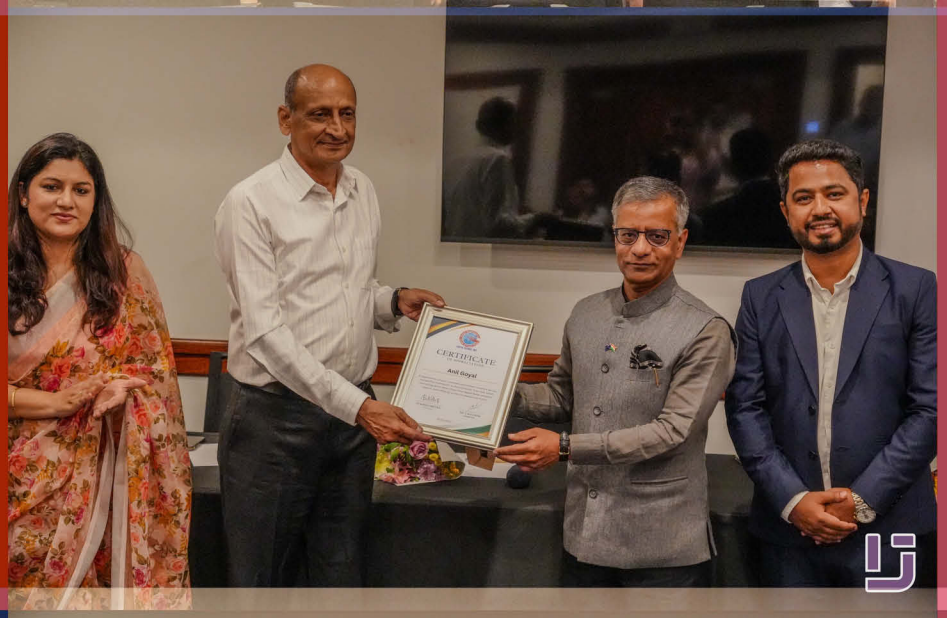
Cairns hosted a community consultation and engagement session from 12 to 14 December during an official visit by Gopal Baglay, High Commissioner of India to Australia, and Neetu Bhagotia, Consul General of India in Brisbane. The visit was organised by GOPIO Cairns Inc and brought together members of the local Indian community for discussions focused on shared priorities and future cooperation.

The High Commissioner and the Consul General met community representatives in Cairns on 13 and 14 December, with the interactive sessions described as highly productive. Conversations centred on community engagement and opportunities for deeper collaboration, with both dignitaries commending the Indian community for its contributions and its role in strengthening India–Australia ties and people-to-people connections, as noted in a post by CGI Brisbane.

Community members, leaders, professionals and **<TURN TO #9>**











> During their stay, the delegation visited the Gurudwara Sahib in Edmonton, where they observed the spirit of seva, unity and equality that underpins Sikh values

<CONTINUED FROM #8> volunteers participated with enthusiasm, raising key issues and exchanging ideas in an open and constructive setting. The strong turnout and candid dialogue reinforced the close relationship between the Far North Queensland community and India's diplomatic leadership in Australia.

During their stay, the delegation visited the Gurudwara Sahib in Edmonton, where they observed the spirit of seva, unity and equality that underpins Sikh values. The visit highlighted the cultural and spiritual links that continue to shape community life and support social harmony within multicultural Australia. Appreciation was extended to the Gurudwara Management Committee for its hospitality and ongoing service.

The visit also created space to acknowledge community achievers whose service continues to support and uplift the Far North Queensland community. Organisers thanked invited guests, community leaders and volunteers for their efforts in ensuring the consultation and engagement sessions were delivered smoothly.

Taken together, the Cairns visit underscored the role of faith, culture and community engagement in fostering inclusive societies and reinforcing the growing partnership between India and Australia.



Namaste India Festival set to bring workshops and culture to Brisbane

OUR REPORTER *BRISBANE*
@the_indian_sun

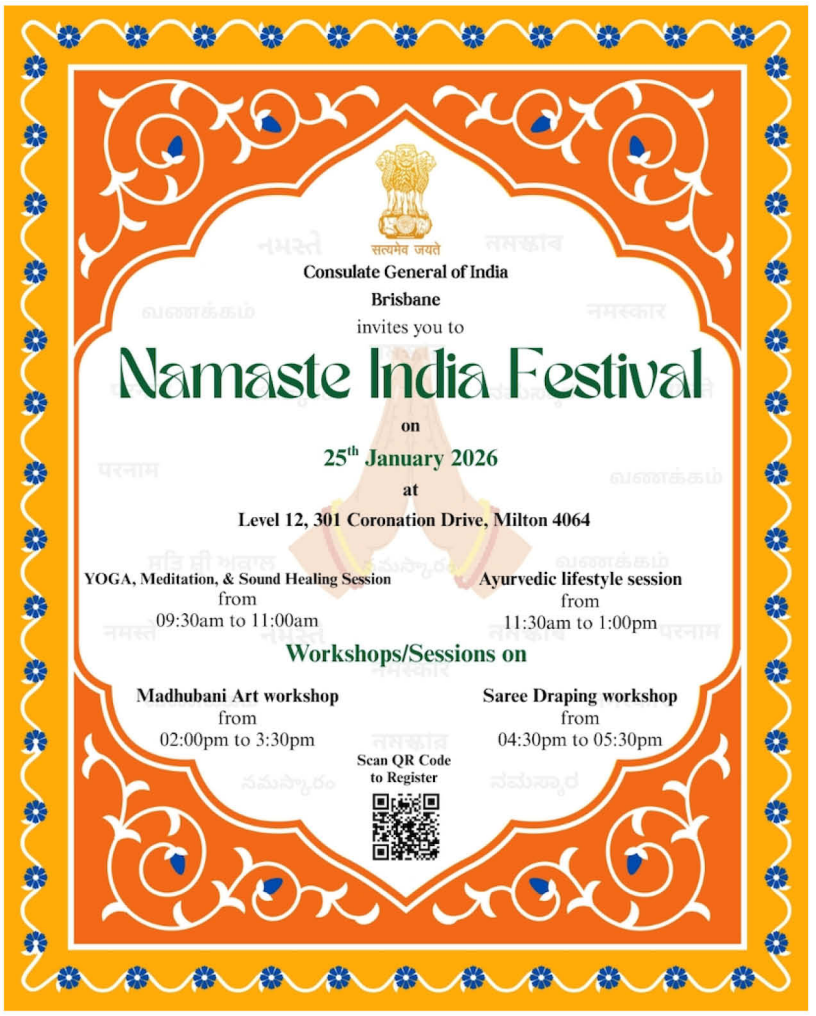
The **Consulate General of India, Brisbane** has announced the **Namaste India Festival**, a one-day event designed to bring Indian culture, arts, and community engagement to Brisbane through a series of hands-on workshops and interactive sessions.

Scheduled for 25 January 2026, the festival will take place at Level 12, 301 Coronation Drive in Milton. The format allows participants to choose the workshops or sessions they wish to attend, shaping a personalised experience rather than a fixed programme.

Organisers say the focus is on participation and exploration, giving attendees a chance to engage directly with elements of India's cultural heritage. With sessions running across the day, the event aims to encourage learning, exchange, and connection within a shared space.

Places for each session are limited, and early registration has been encouraged. The festival is positioned as a community-focused gathering that reflects ongoing cultural links between India and Australia, with Brisbane providing the setting for this exchange.

Further details and registration information are available directly from the Consulate General of India in Brisbane.



FNQ Unity Cricket Cup to bring multicultural celebration to Cairns

OUR REPORTER *CANBERRA*
@the_indian_sun

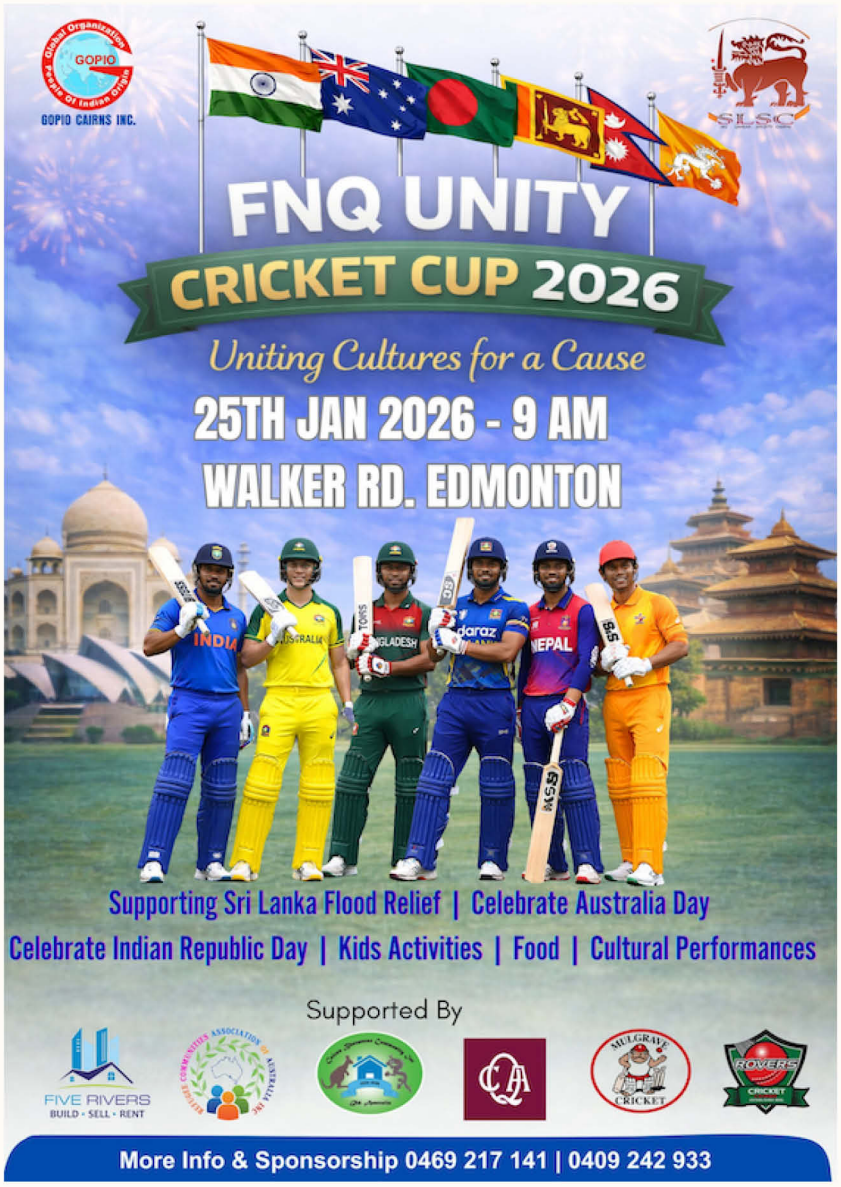
Cairns will host a day of cricket, culture and community when the **FNQ Unity Cricket Cup 2026** is held on Sunday, 25 January at Walker Road, Edmonton, from 9.00 am.

Organised by **GOPIO Cairns Inc.**, the event will see teams representing India, Australia, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bhutan come together for a full day of matches, set against a broader program of cultural activities that reflect the diversity of Far North Queensland.

The timing of the tournament carries added meaning, coinciding with Australia Day and India's Republic Day. Organisers say the occasion reflects shared democratic values and the everyday reality of multicultural life in the region, where communities from different backgrounds live, work and celebrate side by side.

Cricket will be at the centre of the day, but the event extends well beyond the boundary rope. Families attending can expect children's activities, international food stalls, cultural performances and music drawn from the many communities taking part. The aim is to create an open, welcoming space where sport becomes a meeting point rather than the sole focus.

The Cup also includes a humanitarian element, with funds and awareness being raised for Sri Lanka Flood Relief. The initiative highlights how local community events can respond to global needs, using participation and attendance to support those affected by natural disasters.



Organisers say the event has been designed to bring people together across cultures and generations. "It's about bringing people together—many cultures, one cause—and celebrating the true spirit of FNQ," a GOPIO Cairns representative said.

Community members from all backgrounds are encouraged to attend and take part, whether as players, spectators or volunteers. Cricket supporters will see competitive matches across the day, while families and visitors can engage with food, performances and activities that reflect the region's cultural mix.

> The timing carries added meaning, coinciding with Australia Day and India's Republic Day... reflects the reality of everyday multicultural life

The FNQ Unity Cricket Cup has been positioned as a reminder of how community sport can operate as a shared civic space, where enjoyment, participation and social responsibility intersect. By combining competition with cultural exchange and charitable support, organisers hope the event will leave a lasting impression beyond the final match.

Further information is available on ***0469 217 141*** *or* ***0409 242 933***



Queensland's small businesses pass the 500,000 mark

OUR REPORTER *BRISBANE*
@the_indian_sun

Queensland has crossed a significant line, with its small and family businesses exceeding half a million for the first time, rising from 495,000 to over 508,000 enterprises. This milestone places them firmly at the centre of the state's economy, generating an estimated $132 billion annually and employing more than 1.045 million people. The sector's performance directly affects household incomes and local supply chains across cities, towns and regions.

This growth arrives as the Crisafulli Government implements its Small and Family Business First Action Statement, committing over $100 million in new initiatives and grants. It follows what the government describes as a decade of decline under the former Labour administration. For operators, the rising number suggests a recovering confidence, despite persistent challenges like rising costs, workforce shortages and changing consumer habits. Resilience is built on long hours, family support and calculated risks.

Minister Steve Minnikin frames the achievement as a reflection of determination, arguing these businesses are the heart of Queensland's economy and communities. The Action Statement aims to improve the operating environment, with programmes like the Business Growth Fund and Small Business Apprenticeship Pilot offering practical support. The goal is to help businesses invest, expand and hire, particularly younger Queenslanders.

Looking ahead, the 2032 Brisbane Olympic and Paralympic Games present an opportunity. Beyond infrastructure and tourism, the government envisages small businesses securing contracts and building lasting capabilities from the global attention. This prospect adds momentum to decisions today about upgrading systems or exploring new markets.

Growth spans hospitality, retail, construction, professional services and creative industries. In regional areas, these enterprises are vital anchors for employment and social life. The impact of a new café or an expanding trades business ripples quickly through a community.

Brisbane entrepreneur Michele Bei, recently opening 075 Pinsa Romana, describes the process as demanding yet rewarding, driven by creating opportunities and adding to local life. Such stories are common, underpinned by a balance of commercial reality and a desire to contribute positively.

Consumer behaviour is crucial; choosing local services keeps money circulating within communities, supporting jobs and neighbouring businesses. However, challenges persist, including cost pressures, skilled labour shortages and regulatory complexity. The policy test is whether support keeps pace without adding burdensome complexity.

The cultural importance of these businesses is undeniable. They reflect local tastes and identities, from family-run bakeries to spare-room start-ups, shaping how neighbourhoods feel and interact.

Sustaining growth will require attention to succession planning, digital adoption and export readiness. Programmes will be judged on responding to these needs, not just boosting short-term numbers.

The half-million mark underscores that economic strength is built from the ground up. Each enterprise represents a decision to back an idea against uncertainty. Together, they form a substantial pillar of Queensland's economy. Their flexibility and local knowledge position them to thrive in changing times, including towards the 2032 spotlight.

QUEENSLAND HEALTH

Record intake sees QLD attract nation's largest cohort of graduate doctors

OUR REPORTER *BRISBANE*
@the_indian_sun



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Queensland Health will welcome more than 930 first-year graduate doctors in 2026, marking the largest intake in the state's history. For the first time, Queensland has attracted more first-year graduates than any other Australian jurisdiction.

This record intake, surpassing last year's 880, aims to strengthen frontline care amid rising demand. It contributes to the long-term goal of adding 46,000 health staff by 2032. Health Minister Tim Nicholls met with some of the 94 graduates starting at the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital, stating the intake signals Queensland is becoming a destination of choice for early-career doctors.

"This record intake shows our plan to grow our workforce is working," Minister Nicholls said. "Attracting and retaining doctors at the start of their careers means more accessible care and better health outcomes for Queenslanders."

National data shows Queensland received the highest number of first-year graduate applications, overtaking New South Wales and Victoria. Minister Nicholls credited the state's health system reputation, lifestyle, and career opportunities. He also contrasted this with "a decade of decline under Labor," stating the current government is investing in a fresh start for health services.

The graduates will rotate through specialities including emergency medicine, surgery, paediatrics, and mental health, building broad clinical skills while supporting pressured hospital services. Regional and rural hospitals will benefit, with graduates joining facilities in Townsville, Cairns, Hervey Bay, Rockhampton, and Mackay. Metropolitan-based doctors will also have opportunities for rural rotations.

The intake has a strong regional focus through the Queensland Rural Generalist Pathway, with 56 doctors in the 2026 cohort already choosing this specialist career programme.

The numbers of new first year graduate doctors across Queensland are as follows:

- Cairns and Hinterland Hospital and Health Service: 68
- Central Queensland Hospital and Health Service: 43
- Darling Downs Hospital and Health Service: 61
- Gold Coast Hospital and Health Service: 107
- Mackay Hospital and Health Service: 36
- Metro North Hospital and Health Service: 203
- Metro South Hospital and Health Service: 166
- North West Hospital and Health Service: 6
- Sunshine Coast Hospital and Health Service: 79
- Townsville Hospital and Health Service: 74
- West Moreton Hospital and Health Service: 52
- Wide Bay Hospital and Health Service: 36



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$38 million recovery package announced for flood-hit north-west Queensland

OUR REPORTER *BRISBANE*
@the_indian_sun

Flood-affected communities in north-west Queensland are set to receive a further $38 million in disaster recovery support, with the Albanese and Crisafulli Governments outlining a package aimed at farmers, regional infrastructure and immediate stock needs.

The funding, delivered through the joint Commonwealth-state Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements, targets areas that continue to feel the effects of widespread flooding across the region. The largest portion, $21.5 million, has been allocated to Disaster Recovery Grants for primary producers, offering assistance of up to $75,000 per eligible business. Impacted farmers in Carpentaria, Cloncurry, Croydon, Flinders, McKinlay, Richmond and Winton shires can also access upfront payments of $10,000 to help meet urgent costs.

A further $11.5 million has been committed to repairs and flood resilience works at Cloncurry Airport. The investment is expected to restore the damaged airstrip and improve the airport's capacity to handle larger aircraft, a move seen as important for both emergency access and longer-term regional connectivity.

Support for livestock producers has also been expanded, with an extra $5 million added to the emergency fodder package, lifting total funding to $7 million. The program is designed to help producers keep stock fed as recovery continues, with access coordinated through local councils.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said the funding was intended to provide immediate relief while supporting longer-term recovery. He described the measures as a way to help communities rebuild after what has been a difficult period, while reinforcing that affected Queenslanders are not facing the aftermath alone.

Queensland's Acting Premier Jarrod Bleijie said government teams were working on the ground across the north and north-west to shape recovery efforts and deliver assistance where it is needed. He said the focus remained on practical support for communities dealing with the impact of flooding.

Federal Treasurer Jim Chalmers, speaking during a visit to Cloncurry, said the floods had been devastating for farming families and regional industries. He said the latest funding reflected the role regional Queensland plays in the national economy and the need for sustained backing during recovery.

Federal Emergency Management Minister Kristy McBain acknowledged that recovery from disasters can take time, describing the funding as part of a longer process of rebuilding and support. Queensland Minister for Disaster Recovery Ann Leahy said local councils and industry groups had helped shape the measures, reflecting local priorities and conditions.

Applications for primary producer recovery grants are open through the Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority, while those seeking fodder support are advised to contact their local council. Broader disaster information and recovery assistance is available through the Queensland Government's disaster information services and community recovery hotline.

Damien Walker appointed acting Queensland cross-border commissioner

OUR REPORTER *BRISBANE*
@the_indian_sun


Damien Walker

Queensland's most senior public servant, Damien Walker, has been appointed Acting Cross-Border Commissioner as the Queensland Government begins the process of recruiting a permanent office holder.

Mr Walker, who is Director-General of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, steps into the role following the work of the inaugural commissioner, the late Ian Leavers. The appointment is on an interim basis and is intended to provide continuity while the government undertakes a formal search.

The Cross-Border Commissioner role was created to address issues that affect communities and businesses operating near state lines, where differences in laws, policing arrangements and service delivery can create practical problems. These challenges have long been raised by councils, industry groups and residents in border regions, particularly around crime, transport, health access and regulation.

According to the government, Mr Walker will continue working with local communities, regional agencies, industry and other stakeholders to manage those pressures. The Crisafulli Government has framed the appointment within its broader law and order agenda, which includes tougher laws, increased police resources and a stronger focus on early intervention and rehabilitation. Supporters argue this approach brings clearer coordination across borders, while critics have previously cautioned that lasting progress depends on sustained cooperation between states rather than short-term appointments.

Acting Premier Jarrod Bleijie said Mr Walker's background made him well suited to the task. He pointed to more than a decade of executive leadership across two state governments, including a period where Mr Walker served as interim Cross-Border Commissioner in South Australia. Mr Bleijie said the foundations laid by Mr Leavers had positioned the office to continue its work without interruption.

Mr Walker will hold the commissioner role alongside his existing responsibilities as Director-General, a dual arrangement the government says will help maintain momentum. Observers note that combining the roles may place additional demands on the state's top bureaucrat, though it also offers direct access to central decision-making.

In a brief statement, Mr Walker said he would ensure current plans and processes stayed on track. He acknowledged the contribution of Ian Leavers and said collaboration with communities and governments would remain a priority for residents and businesses along Queensland's borders.

The government has not indicated how long the recruitment process for the permanent role is expected to take.



Representational Photo by Wes Warren under the Unsplash+ License

$25m Eagle Farm Grandstand plan moves ahead under Crisafulli government

OUR REPORTER *BRISBANE*
@the_indian_sun

The Queensland Government has committed an initial $25 million to begin redeveloping spectator facilities at Eagle Farm Racecourse, setting the stage for a new grandstand to replace the ageing John Power Stand in Brisbane.

The funding marks the first phase of a broader redevelopment at Queensland's premier thoroughbred venue, with demolition of the existing stand scheduled after the 2026 Winter Carnival. The John Power Stand is due to be decommissioned in August 2026, ending decades of use at the track.

The new grandstand forms part of The Next Lap, the Crisafulli Government's plan for the future of Queensland racing. Alongside the Eagle Farm project, the plan includes a $200 million Racing Future Fund aimed at upgrading racing infrastructure across the state, supporting both metropolitan and regional venues.

According to the government, the new facility at Eagle Farm will feature modern amenities, improved accessibility and upgraded viewing areas designed to enhance the race-day experience for patrons. Eagle Farm has long been regarded as the centrepiece of Queensland thoroughbred racing, hosting major events including the Winter Carnival.

Minister for Sport and Racing Tim Mander said the condition of the existing grandstand meant action was overdue.

"Eagle Farm is Queensland thoroughbred racing's spiritual home, and the government is delivering a facility befitting the state's premier track," he said. He also criticised the previous Labor government, arguing it failed to address ageing infrastructure or provide long-term stability for the racing sector.

The racing industry contributes an estimated $2.5 billion to the Queensland economy and supports thousands of jobs, from trainers and jockeys to hospitality and event staff. The government says its reforms are intended to improve infrastructure, strengthen integrity measures and lift animal welfare standards, while protecting country racing.

Racing Queensland chief executive Lachlan Murray said securing the $25 million allocation from the Racing Infrastructure Fund provided certainty to move forward with planning and procurement.

"Having the funding secured allows us to lay out the timing to begin phase one of the works," he said, noting tenders could now be prepared ahead of demolition starting once the 2026 Winter Carnival concludes. He said the completed stand would offer an improved experience for racegoers.

Brisbane Racing Club chairman Richard Morrison also welcomed the funding, while acknowledging the challenges involved in redeveloping a major venue that remains in regular use.

"The logistics to deliver these kinds of works are enormous, particularly to ensure there is continuity of racing during the redevelopment," he said. He said the club would work closely with Racing Queensland to minimise disruption for participants and punters between the end of the 2026 Winter Carnival and the start of the 2027 season.

While the announcement has been welcomed by industry leaders, the full scope, design and final cost of the redevelopment are yet to be detailed, and further funding decisions will be watched closely as planning progresses.

More information on the government's racing plan is available through here: https://thenextlap.sport.qld.gov.au

COX, Hassell and Azusa Sekkei chosen to design Brisbane's new Victoria Park stadium

OUR REPORTER *BRISBANE*
@the_indian_sun



Global experience meets local character as COX, Hassell and Azusa Sekkei are named to design Brisbane's new Victoria Park stadium for the 2032 Games and beyond. Photo/Brisbane Instagram Page

An international team has been appointed to design Brisbane's new stadium at Victoria Park, a centrepiece for the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Australian firms COX and Hassell will partner with Japan's Azusa Sekkei, following a selection process by the Games Independent Infrastructure and Coordination Authority (GIICA). The consortium combines expertise from venues like Perth's Optus Stadium and Tokyo's Japan National Stadium.

The stadium will host the opening and closing ceremonies and athletics. Post-Games, it will operate as a 63,000-seat legacy venue, serving as Brisbane's primary stadium and home for teams including the Brisbane Lions and Brisbane Heat.

GIICA confirmed the architects were selected after an open call and expert panel assessment. Engineering firms Arup and sbp will support the design, with a particular focus on the roof, crucial for managing Brisbane's climate.

Governments present the appointment as a step to rebuild momentum for Games delivery. Federal Infrastructure Minister Catherine King said the project is moving to early design, focusing on timely, budget-conscious delivery for future global events and local use. Queensland Deputy Premier Jarrod Bleijie said it aims to restore confidence in the Games programme, which has faced public debate over cost and location.

However, debates continue. Victoria Park's redevelopment has raised community concerns over green space. The overall $7.1 billion Games Venues Infrastructure Programme, funding 17 venues, ensures ongoing scrutiny of design, environmental impact, and long-term use.

GIICA chairman Stephen Conry said the decision prioritised design quality, collaboration, and proven delivery experience, highlighting the team's blend of local knowledge and global resources. Early design and project validation will now commence.

The architects' approach responds to Brisbane's context. COX Architecture director Richard Coulson said the design draws from the traditional Queenslander, emphasising shade, breezes, and views to connect the stadium to the parkland. Hassell's Lucy O'Driscoll stressed adaptability for diverse sporting and cultural events, aiming for a community asset that endures for decades.

Azusa Sekkei brings experience from large-scale events in dense urban settings, including Tokyo 2020, a project that also faced critiques over costs and delays—a reminder of the challenges inherent in such major projects.

For Brisbane, this appointment marks a shift from debate towards delivery, though final designs, environmental assessments, and construction schedules remain unresolved. These will shape public opinion as much as the early concepts. The stadium's ultimate success will be judged not just by its role in 2032, but by how well it serves the city long after the Games conclude.



In Bondi's darkest week, Turbans 4 Australia serves compassion

INDIRA LAISRAM
𝕏 @indira_laisram

As grief hung heavy over Bondi this week, a quiet act of compassion unfolded in the area, offering comfort where words often fell short. Volunteers from **Turbans 4 Australia (T4A)** came together to distribute free food and water to a community mourning the devastating terrorist attack that shocked the nation.

From Monday through to yesterday, the Sikh-led charity mobilised dozens of volunteers, young and old, to serve those paying their respects.

The organisation's founder, Amar Singh, spoke to The Indian Sun as the group concluded its on-the-ground service yesterday. His voice, weary but resolute, carried both the weight of the community's grief and the purpose of his team's mission.

"This is our solidarity for a community affected by terrorism," Singh said. "Australia is my country as well, and nobody can accept this kind of violence."

Over the course of the week, the organisation 〈TURN TO #19〉



CONTINUED FROM #18 distributed around 5,000 bottles of water, one tonne of bananas and approximately 2,500 hot vegetarian meals. Understanding the specific needs of many mourners gathered at vigils, volunteers also provided kosher snacks—including chips, chocolates and lollies—for Jewish community members.

"We were doing about five to six boxes of bananas every day, several bottles of water and around 300 hot meals daily," Singh said. "It was an act of kindness. Many people came up saying they hadn't had a meal."

What made the effort even more remarkable was the diversity of those involved. The oldest volunteer was 74-year-old Shailinder, a fifth-generation Australian whose family has called this country home for 135 years. The youngest volunteer was just six years old.

For Shailinder, the tragedy struck a deep chord. Having lived through decades of Australia's peace, the event came as a profound shock. "They have never seen anything this bad in Australia," Singh shared on her behalf. "It is such a peaceful country."

Around 10 to 15 volunteers were on the ground each day, handing out food and water, while others worked behind the scenes cooking meals, sourcing supplies and coordinating logistics. Friends and supporters used trucks to transport food, often spending long hours to ensure everything reached Bondi in time.



"Most of our volunteers don't even live in Bondi," Singh said. "For some, it was an hour's drive one way. They gave their time freely, it was a huge service and a huge generosity."

Turbans 4 Australia was founded by Amar Singh in 2015 with the aim of promoting volunteering, giving back to the country and fostering harmony and social change. Over the years, the organisation has become widely known for responding swiftly to crises—whether bushfires, floods or moments of national tragedy—guided by the Sikh principle of seva, or selfless service.

This week's response, Singh said, was driven by that same belief.

As candles burned and flowers filled memorial sites, Turbans 4 Australia offered more than food and water—it showed that even in tragedy, communities can come together with care and kindness.



A Melbourne artist stitches memory, holding onto a childhood home

INDIRA LAISRAM
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For Melbourne-based artist **Abhijit Pal**, imagination didn't need toys. It just needed a corner. A quiet space where a shadow could become a kingdom, or a bedroom floor a busy hospital, all ruled by the boundless freedom of a child's mind. This deep, personal world is the heart of his first Australian solo exhibition, 'My Elder Sister', opening in Melbourne on 15 January.

The show is a quiet homecoming of sorts. It centres on photographs of his family's now-abandoned house in India, a place foundational to his early years. Last year, living far away in Melbourne, Pal felt a "quiet pull" to return.

"Distance creates clarity," he tells The Indian Sun. "I sensed that it might soon disappear... I felt the need to see it again, to acknowledge where imagination first felt safe, generous, and limitless."

What he found was not a ruin, but a transformation. Nature was gently reclaiming the spaces where he once played. "Walls 〈TURN TO #21〉



❮CONTINUED FROM #20❯ fading, plants entering rooms, light and silence settling in," he recalls. "It didn't feel sad. It felt natural." This peaceful acceptance of change set the emotional tone for the work that followed.

Pal's practice uniquely blends photography with the slow, tactile tradition of Kantha embroidery. Onto these evocative images of empty rooms and overgrown courtyards, he stitches faint lines of text. They are not loud statements, but whispers—simple memories of the games and roles invented in those very spots.

"The words emerge naturally," he explains, "like memories returning softly, without drama." The embroidery, he finds, slows down the often-immediate nature of photography. "It allows me to sit with the image longer, to listen to it. The photograph becomes less about documentation and more about emotion and touch."

Using Kantha, a tradition with a deep history of storytelling and repair, feels instinctively right to him. "It's intimate and resilient," Pal says. "It feels like a language that already understands how to hold memory gently."



While the work touches on themes of change and the passage of time, Pal is clear that it is not an act of mourning. "It feels closest to preservation," he says, "but more about the joy of revisiting. It's a gentle holding. A way of saying: this mattered, and it still does."

In today's fast-paced, screen-filled world, the contrast to his childhood of unstructured play emerged naturally during his process. His work isn't a rejection of modern life, but a reminder. "Another way of being once existed very easily," he suggests, "and perhaps still does."

Ultimately, Pal hopes viewers find their own memories in his quiet, stitched scenes. "I hope they recall a small moment, perhaps a sibling, a game, or a space that once held imagination," he says. "Even a brief recognition is enough."

'My Elder Sister' is an ongoing series, one Pal plans to expand with other spaces and memories. For now, it stands as a tender, resilient tribute to the places that shape us, and the limitless inner worlds they help build.

'My Elder Sister' by Abhijit Pal runs from 15 January to 14 March 2026 at Kingston Arts Centre, Moorabbin. For more details: https://l1nq.com/26HLq



Arvind Shrivastava // File photo



A Gentle Giant of the Community: Farewell Arvind Shrivastava

OUR REPORTER
@the_indian_sun

The Indian community in Victoria is in mourning following the passing of **Arvind Shrivastava**, a revered scholar, priest, and community pillar. Shrivastava passed away yesterday at 5 am, a loss confirmed to The Indian Sun by Manoj Kumar, Chairperson of the Australian Multicultural Organisation Network (AMON), who said who said he had been admitted to Knox Private Hospital for the past few days.

Paying tribute, Kumar described Shrivastava as a guiding presence in his life. "He was like a father figure to me and always guided me," he said.

Tributes have poured in from across the community, painting a picture of a man dedicated to faith, culture, and selfless service.

Raj Dudeja, a friend and also a senior community figure, also expressed profound sorrow. "It's really very sad news! He was a good friend, a very wise scholar, a devoted Hindu priest and a community person," Dudeja said. "My wife and I had the opportunity to work with him in the AIII committee meetings ❮TURN TO #23❯



From Left: Dr Sunila, Arvind Shrivastava and Manoj Kumar // Photo courtesy of Manoj Kumar

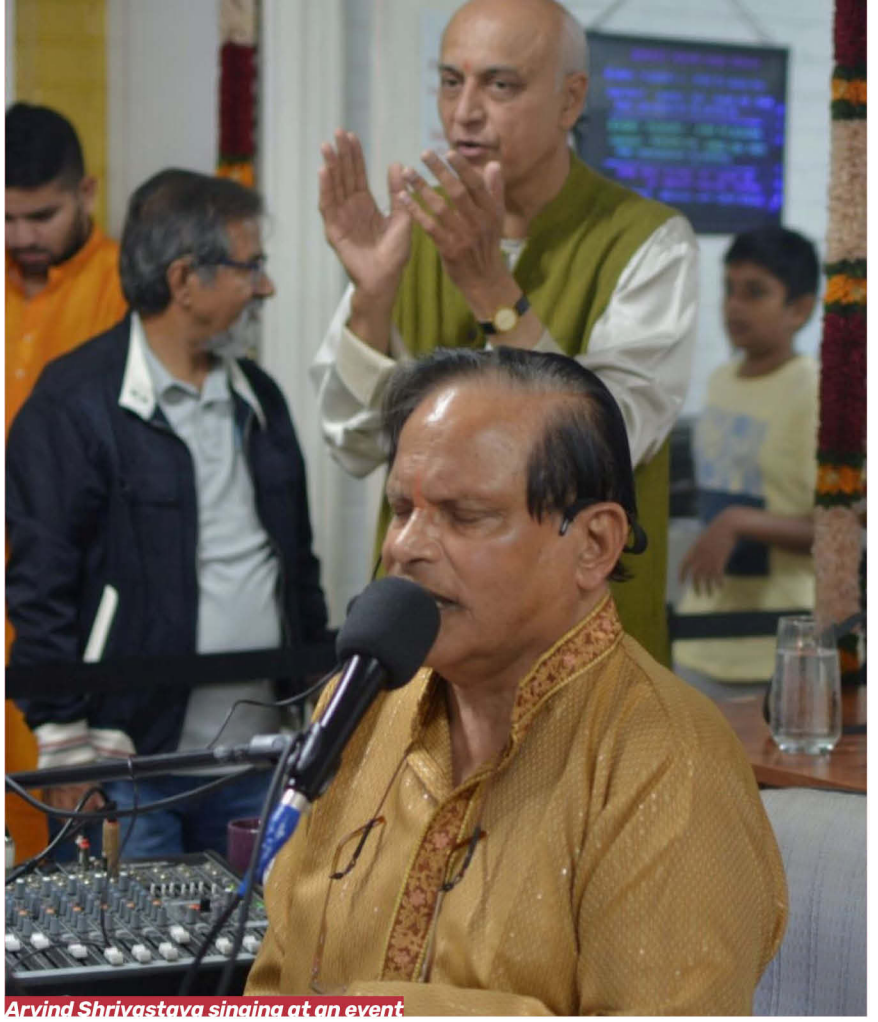
<CONTINUED FROM #22> and in organising AIII Diwali Melas. We found him a thorough gentleman, very straightforward and to the point. How can I ever forget the songs that he used to sing with his wife, amazing! May God rest his soul in peace. He really deserves it. I sincerely convey my condolences to his family."

Shrivastava's commitment to community service was a lifelong passion, famously shared with his wife of over 50 years, Dr Sunila. As profiled by The Indian Sun in 2020, the Torquay-based couple were the dynamic force behind decades of cultural and charitable work.

Shrivastava migrated to Australia in 1968 on a research scholarship at Monash University after completing his Master of Engineering from the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, at a time when Indian migration to Australia was still limited.

He went on to have a distinguished academic career at Monash University, later serving as Executive Director of the Advanced Manufacturing Technology Centre, before retiring in 1999.

Retirement marked the beginning of an even deeper commitment to community service. Along with his wife, he became a pillar of the Indian community in Victoria, helping organise major cultural and religious events including Diwali and Holi celebrations, while also working quietly behind the scenes to support those in need.



Arvind Shrivastava singing at an event

The couple founded the Sankat Mochan Samiti, a not-for-profit organisation aimed at providing spiritual, emotional and practical support to community members, including assistance to victims of family violence.

Shrivastava also served in leadership and advisory roles with several organisations, including the Australia India Society, the Indian Club of Victoria, and the Victorian Police Multi-Faith Council, strengthening ties between faith communities and public institutions.

In 2018, his tireless service was formally recognised when he was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) for his contribution to the Indian community in Melbourne.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Shrivastava and his wife continued their service through Bhakti Tarang, a series of devotional prayer and singing sessions that brought comfort and connection to many during isolation.

Arvind Shrivastava's passing leaves a significant void, but his legacy of scholarly contribution, devotional spirit, and unwavering community service will continue to inspire the many lives he touched.





Multicultural and multifaith leaders stand in solidarity with the Jewish community in Melbourne // Photo supplied

Diverse communities, one message: No place for antisemitism

OUR REPORTER
@the_indian_sun

Victorian multicultural and multifaith communities have united in a peaceful community vigil, standing in solidarity with the Jewish community.

Yesterday's vigil, held by the Victorian Multicultural Commission on Sunday 21 December, took place one week after the antisemitic terror attack at Bondi Beach in Sydney and reaffirmed a shared commitment to respect, compassion and social cohesion across Victoria.

The Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Ingrid Stitt MP, joined the gathering at St Peter's Eastern Hill Hall, standing alongside Victoria's diverse communities, including members of the Victorian Multicultural Commission's Regional Advisory Councils and Multifaith Advisory Group.

Chief Executive Officer of the Jewish Community Council of Victoria, Naomi Levin, delivered a heartfelt address acknowledging the deep pain and suffering felt within the Jewish community.

Faith and 〈TURN TO #25〉



> Our hearts go out to the victims, their families and the Australian Jewish community. We stand united in our grief, and united against hate, division, terrorism and antisemitism

INGRID STITT MP



Multicultural and multifaith leaders stand in solidarity with the Jewish community in Melbourne // Photos supplied

CONTINUED FROM #24 community leaders, including Archbishop Ric Thorpe and Batul Gulani, offered their condolences and underscored the importance of unity and harmony among Victoria's diverse communities.

The Jewish Museum of Victoria provided fifteen candles, which were lit by multicultural community leaders in remembrance of the fifteen innocent lives lost in the terror attack.

Attendees then laid flowers in a shared act of remembrance and solidarity.

Together, the communities stood united against hate and violence, reaffirming a commitment to building a Victoria where every community feels safe, respected and supported. Antisemitism has no place in our society.

Minister Stitt said, "Our hearts go out to the victims, their families and the Australian Jewish community. We stand united in our grief, and united against hate, division, terrorism and antisemitism."

Victorian Multicultural Commission Chairperson Vivienne Nguyen AM, said, "The Victorian Multicultural Commission stands shoulder to shoulder with the Jewish community in grief and solidarity. Our strength lies in unity. Violence and hatred tear at the fabric of our multicultural nation, and we will not allow fear to divide us."





Representational Photo by Sunil Chandra Sharma on Unsplash

India lead arrivals as Australia's net migration slows to 306,000

OUR REPORTER
@the_indian_sun

India continues to be the largest source of migrant arrivals to Australia, but new data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) shows that net overseas migration to Australia slowed significantly in the 2024-25 financial year.

According to the latest figures released today, Australia recorded a net overseas migration gain of 306,000 people in the year ending 30 June 2025. This is down from a net gain of 429,000 the previous year, and well below the record high of 538,000 in 2022-23.

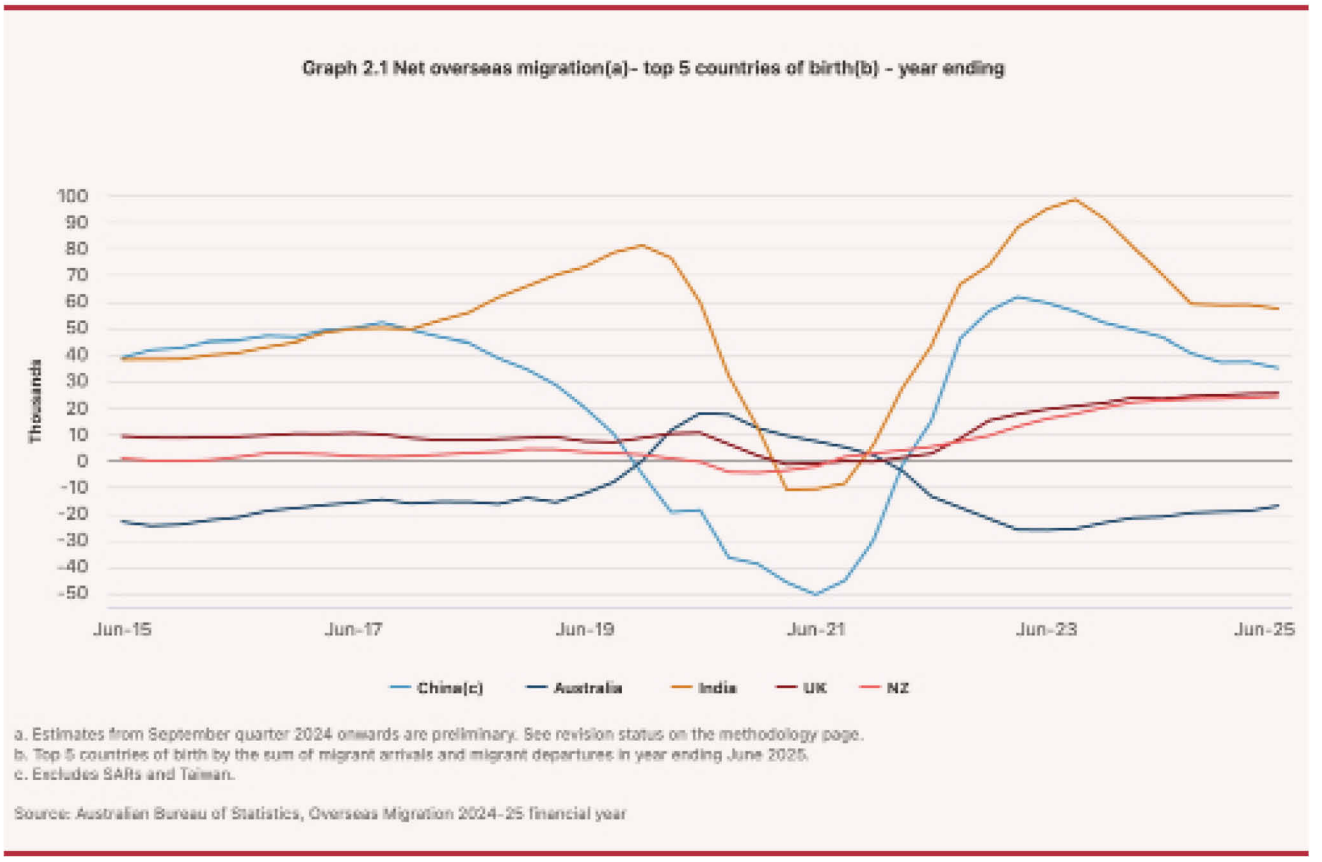
INDIA LEADS MIGRANT ARRIVALS, BUT NUMBERS DECLINE FROM RECENT PEAK

India topped the list of countries of birth for migrant arrivals in 2024-25, followed by China, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand. However, while India remains the largest contributor of new arrivals, the number of Indian-born migrants entering Australia decreased compared to the previous year.

Analysis of migration trends over the past decade reveals **<TURN TO #27>**

Analysis of migration trends over the past decade reveals that Indian-born migrant arrivals steadily increased before the COVID-19 pandemic, peaking at 111,000 arrivals

Net overseas migration—the difference between arrivals and departures—remains a vital driver of Australia's population growth



a. Estimates from September quarter 2024 onwards are preliminary. See revision status on the methodology page.
b. Top 5 countries of birth by the sum of migrant arrivals and migrant departures in year ending June 2025.
c. Excludes SARs and Taiwan.

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Overseas Migration 2024-25 financial year

CONTINUED FROM #26 that Indian-born migrant arrivals steadily increased before the COVID-19 pandemic, peaking at 111,000 arrivals in the year ending September 2023. Since then, arrivals have declined to approximately 76,000 annually, a level below the pre-pandemic period, but have remained stable over the past four quarters.

This decline contrasts with the recovery seen in arrivals from countries like the United Kingdom and New Zealand, which experienced increases in 2024-25 and have surpassed pre-pandemic levels.

OVERALL MIGRATION TRENDS AND CONTEXT

Net overseas migration—the difference between arrivals and departures—remains a vital driver of Australia's population growth, despite the recent slowdown.

Historically, **TURN TO #29**



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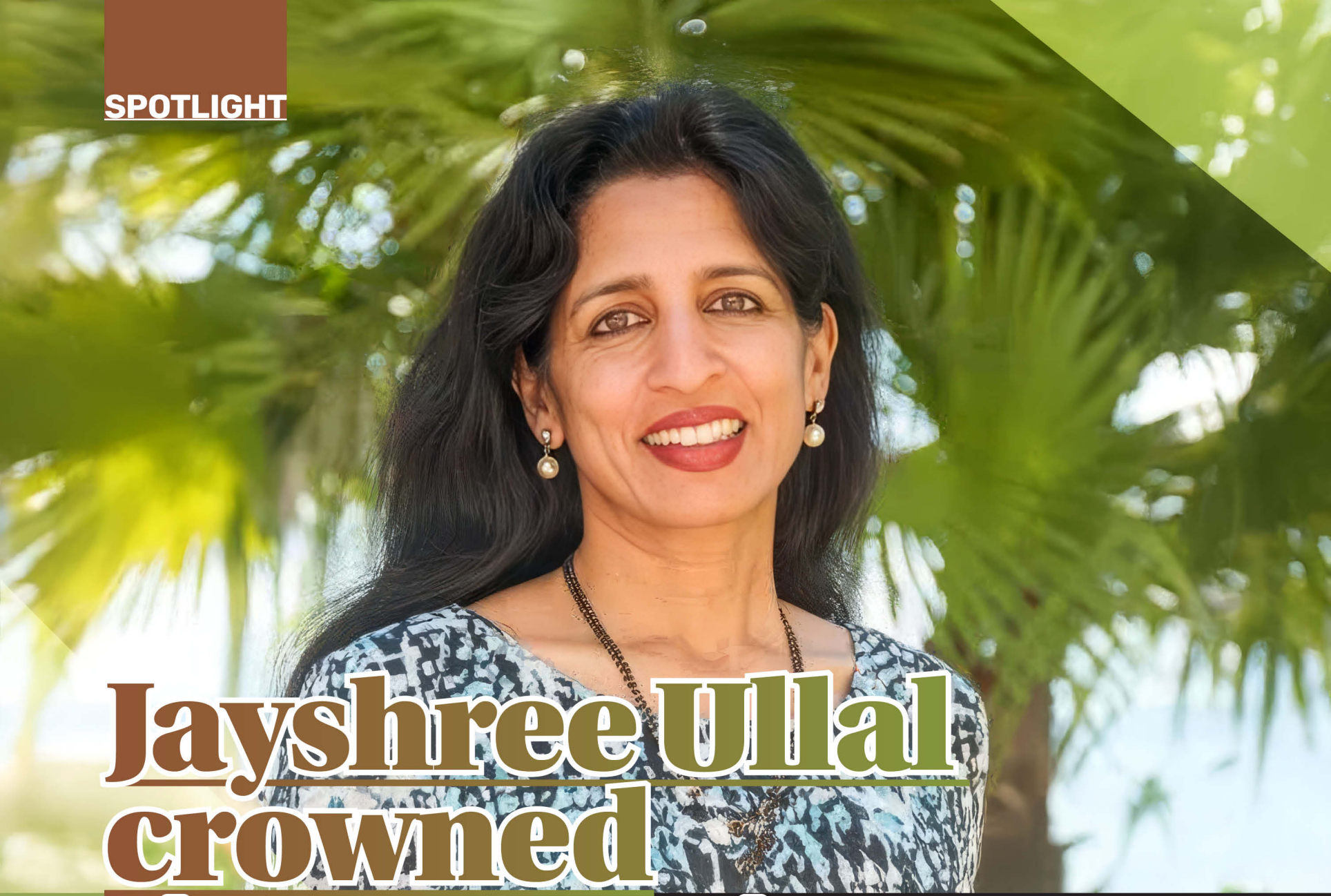
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Jayshree Ullal crowned richest Indian professional manager

OUR REPORTER
@the_indian_sun

Indian-origin technology leader Jayshree Ullal has emerged as the richest Indian professional manager, overtaking some of the world's most prominent tech executives, including Google CEO Sundar Pichai and Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella.

According to the Hurun India Rich List 2025, Ullal's net worth is estimated at Rs 50,170 crore, placing her at the top among professional managers. The list is published by Hurun India, which tracks wealth creation, innovation and philanthropy in the country through influential rankings such as the India Rich List and the India 500.

Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella ranks second on the list with a net worth of Rs 9,770 crore, while Sundar Pichai is placed seventh with Rs 5,810 crore. Former PepsiCo CEO Indra Nooyi ranks eighth with Rs 5,130 crore.

Ullal has also been named the richest Indian woman on the Hurun India Rich List 2025, ahead of prominent business leaders such as Zoho co-founder Radha Vembu and Nykaa founder Falguni Nayar.

Hurun India was launched in 2012 under the leadership of Anas Rahman Junaid and has become a key reference point for mapping India's business landscape, highlighting the country's top wealth creators, innovators and philanthropists.

Born in London and raised in New Delhi, Ullal's rise from Indian classrooms to the upper echelons of Silicon Valley reflects a career shaped by long-term leadership and global impact. She currently serves as President and Chief Executive Officer of Arista Networks, a US-based computer networking company she has led since 2008.

Under her leadership, Arista Networks has grown into one of Silicon Valley's most successful networking firms and a major global technology player. According to Forbes, the company was valued at around USD 7 billion in 2024. Ullal owns approximately 3 per cent of the company, a stake that has contributed significantly to her wealth.

Based in San Francisco, Ullal is widely regarded for her strategic vision and for building Arista Networks into a high-growth technology powerhouse.

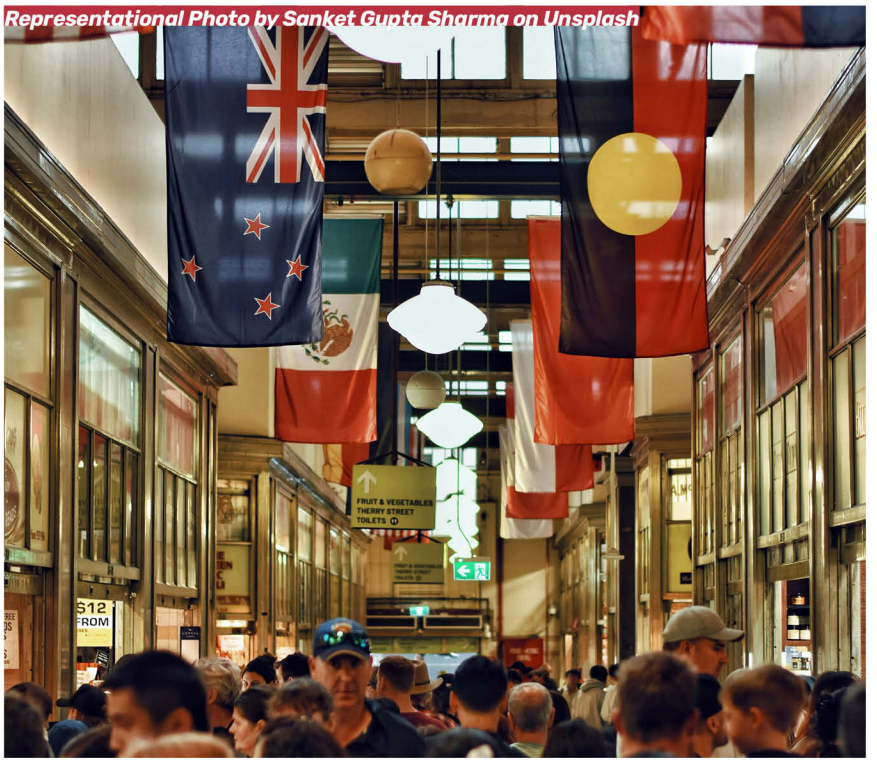
Ullal completed her schooling in India before moving to the United States for higher education. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Electrical Engineering from San Francisco State University and a Master's degree from Santa Clara University.

Her top ranking on the Hurun India Rich List 2025 highlights the growing influence of Indian-origin executives in shaping the global technology landscape.

New Zealand arrivals also rose significantly, with 35,000 people arriving in 2024-25—56% higher than the pre-pandemic average

CONTINUED FROM #27 Australia has attracted more migrants than it has lost, except during the border closures and travel restrictions of 2020 and 2021 caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the reopening of borders in February 2022, migration surged to a peak net gain of 556,000 people in the year ending September 2023.

However, the 2024-25 financial year marks the seventh consecutive quarter of declining net overseas migration. The slowdown is largely attributed to fewer arrivals, especially temporary visa holders, and increased departures.



Representational Photo by Sanket Gupta Sharma on Unsplash

OTHER NOTABLE MIGRATION PATTERNS

- China remains a major source country but has seen a decline in migrant arrivals since peaking before the pandemic in 2017 and again in mid-2023.
- The United Kingdom recorded 40,000 arrivals in 2024-25, a 26% increase over the five-year pre-pandemic average, boosted by a near doubling of temporary working holiday visas.
- New Zealand arrivals also rose significantly, with 35,000 people arriving in 2024-25—56% higher than the pre-pandemic average.
- There was a net loss of 17,000 Australian-born residents during the year, continuing a long-term trend that was briefly reversed by the pandemic.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND ECONOMY

India's sustained position as the leading source of migrant arrivals reflects strong educational, professional, and family migration ties with Australia. Despite the recent dip in arrivals, the Indian community continues to play a vital role in supporting Australia's labour market, innovation sectors, and cultural diversity.

The recent slowdown in overall net migration may impact Australia's population growth and economic recovery, particularly in regions heavily reliant on international migrants.

The ABS migration report offers detailed insights by visa category, age, sex, and location, helping policymakers and businesses plan for ongoing demographic changes.

For more information and full migration statistics, click here: https://shorturl.at/m0l6p.



"Our Bravest": Albanese meets Bondi hero shot twice in attack

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese visited the recovering Bondi hero, Ahmed al Ahmed, who was shot while disarming a terrorist attacker at

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese meets Bondi hero Ahmed al Ahmed at St George Hospital, Sydney

OUR REPORTER *SYDNEY*
@the_indian_sun



He is now known as the **Bondi hero. Ahmed al Ahmed** had a special visitor in hospital today, with Prime Minister Anthony Albanese meeting him as he recovers from his injuries.

Ahmed, 43, is recovering at St George's Hospital, Sydney, after being shot while tackling and disarming one of the attackers at Bondi Beach on Sunday. Despite being hit several times, he managed to seize the man's weapon and stop further harm.

The Prime Minister described him as a true Australian hero and said he was humble about what he had done. "You put yourself at risk to save others, running towards danger on Bondi Beach and disarming a terrorist… Your courage is very inspiring," he told Ahmed.

"Ahmed al Ahmed represents the best of our country. We will not allow this country to be divided. That is what the terrorists seek. We will unite, we will embrace each other and we will get through this. We are a brace country," the Prime Minister said.

Ahmed had been at Bondi Beach on Sunday with friends and relatives, trying to get a cup of coffee when gunfire erupted. He found himself at a moment where people were being shot in front of him.

The 43-year-old man, an owner of a fruit shop in Sutherland and father of two, was shot twice as he charged the attacker, wrestled the rifle from his hands and turned it on him as the gunman retreated.

Video of the moment quickly spread online, showing the unarmed man grappling with the attacker.

The Age reported that Ahmed, who arrived in Australia from Syria in 2006 and became a citizen in 2022, felt a strong sense of responsibility to the community that welcomed him. He told those close to him that he does not regret his actions and would do the same again, despite being in severe pain. His migration lawyer, Sam Issa, said the injuries have taken a heavy toll.

His actions have drawn praise from around the world, including from US President Donald Trump, who described him as "a very brave person" who saved many lives.

> Ahmed al Ahmed represents the best of our country. We will not allow this country to be divided. That is what the terrorists seek. We will unite
>
> **PM ANTHONY ALBANESE**

The Bondi Beach attack, which has now claimed 16 lives, has shocked the world, but Ahmed's courage has been widely recognised as an example of extraordinary bravery by an ordinary member of the public.

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Melbourne, Victoria

About the business
- Well branded and well established in the area
- Includes website and social media accounts
- Location on busy retail strip
- Longterm repeating clientele
- Six (6) day a week business. Trading hours 9 to 5
- Secure lease in place
- Current owner available for handover and strategic support during transition

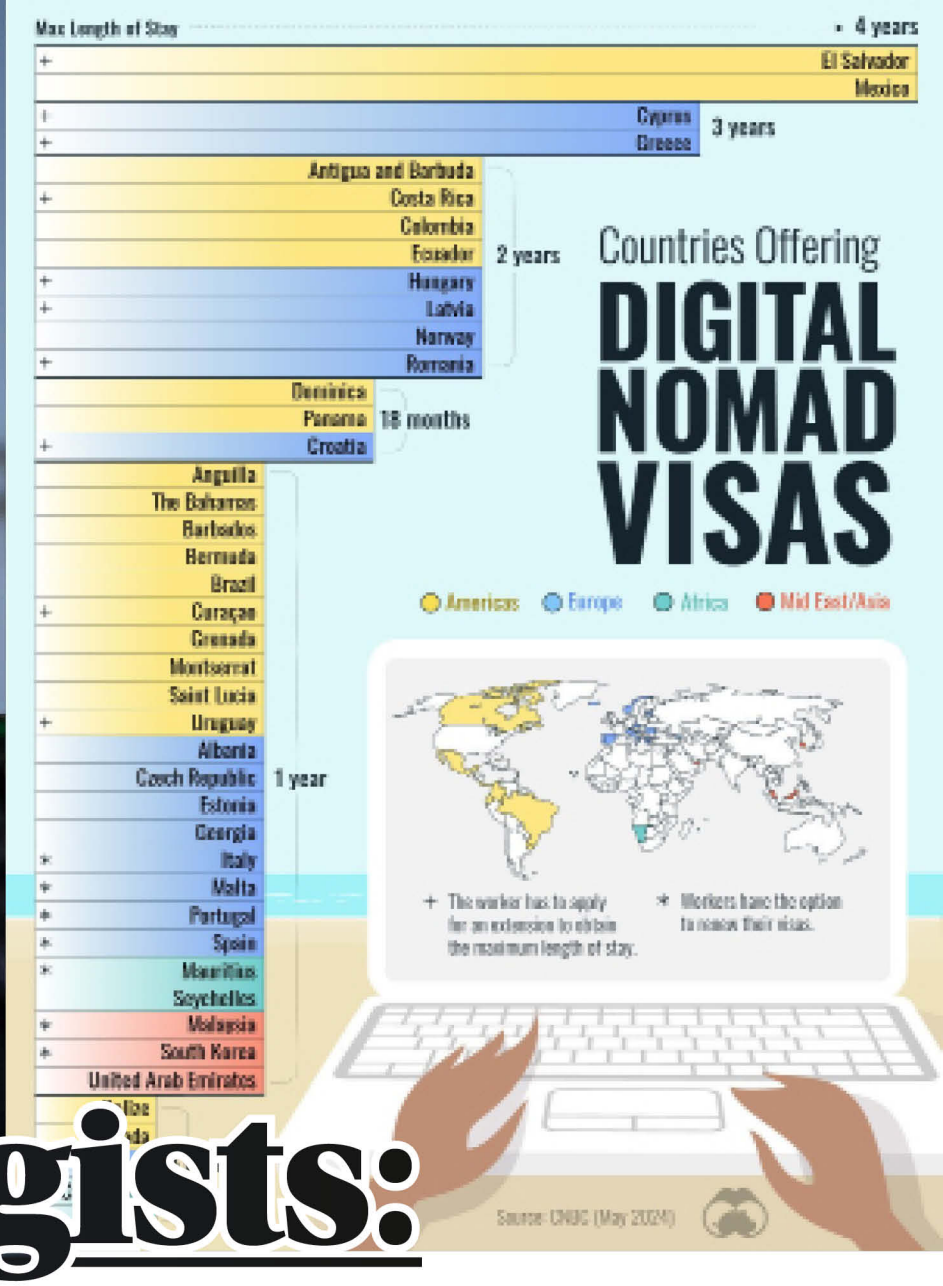


Potential
- Currently run under semi-management so a new full-time owner/operator can spend more time on growth
- Mobile services could be an option
- More focus on online marketing

Reason for sale
- Owner and founder of over 10 years looking to retire

Contact us on daniel.bona@finnbusinesssales.com.au





Balaji warns Indian technologists: "Don't move to America"

OUR REPORTER
𝕏 @the_indian_sun

American entrepreneur and investor **Balaji Srinivasan** has issued one of his starkest assessments yet of the road ahead for Indian technologists weighing a move to the United States. His argument rests on the shifting politics of American immigration and the broader turbulence of the country's fiscal position. The message is directed at a generation of engineers, founders and investors who once saw the US as the most reliable launch pad for global careers.

"If you're Indian, don't move to America. Because the US left hates technocapitalists. And the US right wants no more immigrants," he says. He links that political mood to the pressures of America's rising debt burden, warning that "as the sovereign debt crisis worsens... it only gets worse. Possibly murderously worse."

Balaji frames the choice facing Indian technologists as a practical reassessment rather than nostalgia for what the US offered in the past. "Indian immigrant technocapitalists need alternatives. And there are three options: India, Internet, and International."

His first point focuses on economic momentum. "India itself is the world's fastest growing economy, with the #1 growth rate in the world over the last 10 years. Every major company is investing in India. So you can do well in the Indian economy." The remark taps into ongoing shifts in global supply chains, capital markets and manufacturing footprints that are giving India greater weight in technology and services.

His second argument turns to the digital economy. "The Internet is taking over from a fading NYSE/NASDAQ as the world's largest capital market." He cites the trend of founders and major firms shifting incorporation away from Delaware and the growing appeal of crypto-native ecosystems. "The decline of Delaware and NYC accelerate this; everyone from Elon to Elad Gil to a16z to Dropbox have moved out of Delaware for incorporation, and Mamdani is catalyzing a capital exodus to Miami." For Indian technologists, he says, this marks a levelling moment. "Solana and Ethereum already put Indians on a level playing field with the entire world, with digital rule-of-law. No one can discriminate against you in a smart contract simply for being Indian, so you can do well in the Internet economy."

His final option is geographic rather than digital. "At the exact moment that the US has stopped recruiting tech talent while India is generating enormous amounts of it, the rest of the world is opening their doors to digital nomads." The shift is most visible in Asia and the Gulf. "Dozens of places from the UAE to Singapore have created many different kinds of talent visas. And so Indian technologists have begun rerouting there, especially to Dubai and Singapore. So that's the third option: the International economy."

Balaji reiterated his warning: "Do not expect the US to suddenly become more friendly towards immigrant capitalists. The long-term financial outlook is not good, so America is unfortunately no longer a good place to build a stable life and a career. Which is why Americans themselves are in a zero-sum mentality." He offers little expectation of a shift. "You can't fix that."

His message ended with direct advice for those weighing their next move. "Instead, if you're an Indian technologist, rely only on TCP/IP rather than H-1B. And build yourself up in India, on the Internet, or internationally."

How Punjabi youth Amandeep Singh Bola tackled Bondi shooter

OUR REPORTER *SYDNEY*
@the_indian_sun

Stories of courage continue to emerge from the tragic Bondi Beach shooting, where 13 innocent people lost their lives at a Hanukkah event on Sunday evening. In the chaotic aftermath of the attack, as panic erupted and shots rang out, personal trainer **Amandeep Singh Bola** made a split-second decision that defied every instinct for self-preservation. He ran towards the danger and it ended with him physically pinning one of the alleged shooters to the ground, helping police handcuff the man.

> I jumped on top of him and grabbed his arms. The police officer helped me and said, 'Don't let him go.' He put a handcuff around one arm, and I grabbed the other handcuff
>
> **AMANDEEP SINGH BOLA**



SBS News reports that on Sunday evening, after a work Christmas event, Bola had stepped out for a kebab, hoping to watch the sunset over the iconic beach. The peace shattered with what he initially dismissed as "pops."

"I was just having a yarn with other guys, we were just talking, and that's when we heard all the pops and then people just started screaming and running like I've never seen before... just full on sprinting and everybody's panicking," he told SBS News.

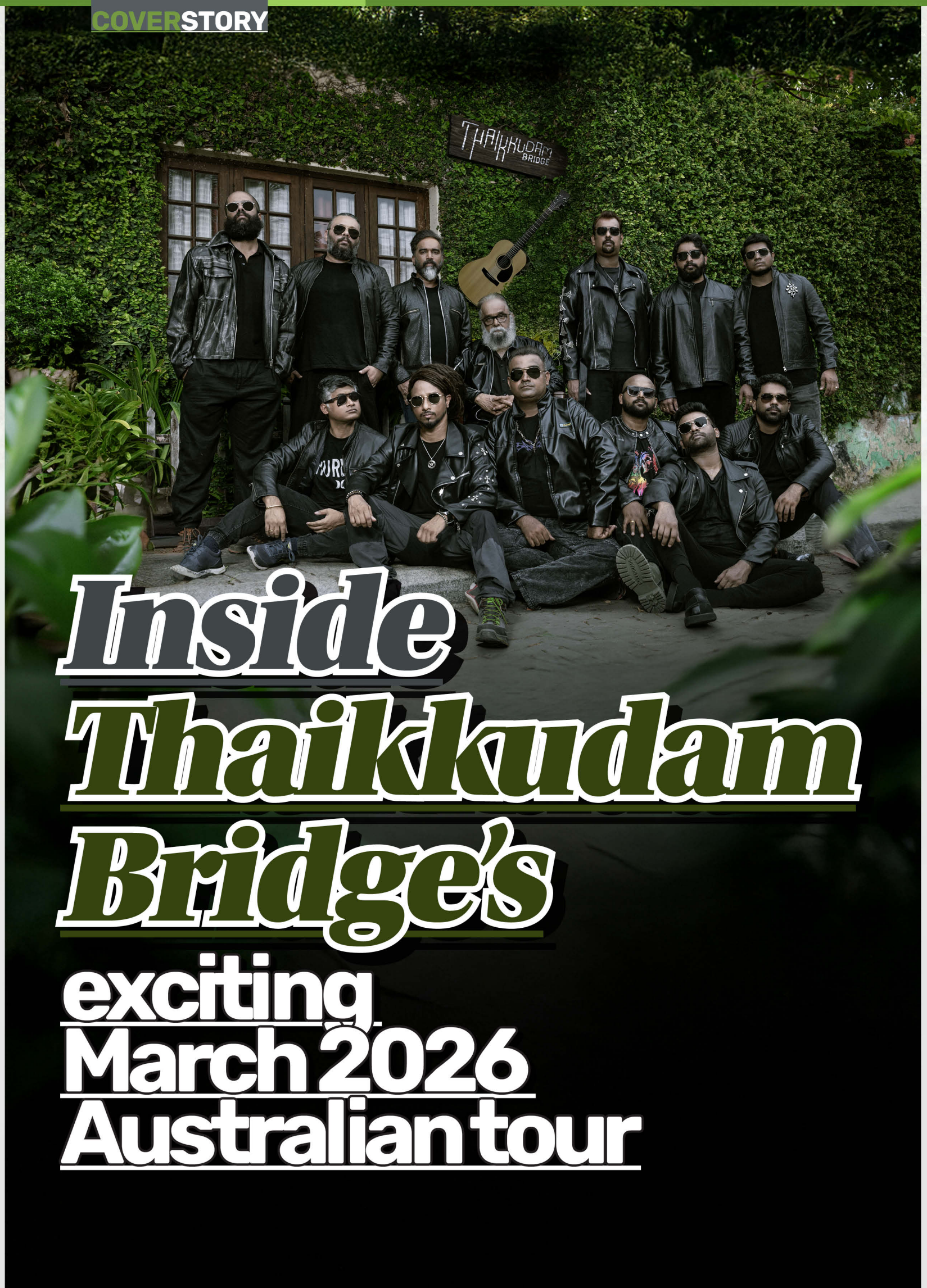
Instead of fleeing, he ran towards the danger. He found one of the alleged shooters, later identified as Sajid Akram, and jumped on top of him. With the help of a police officer, Bola pinned the man down until officers could handcuff him.

"I jumped on top of him and grabbed his arms. The police officer helped me and said, 'Don't let him go.' He put a handcuff around one arm, and I grabbed the other handcuff," Bola said.

He also described the support of strangers during the chaos. "There were girls comforting each other, a French guy gave me coconut water, and two African men stayed by my side to make sure I was okay. That was the only comfort in it."

On social media and elswhere, Bola has been praised for his heroic act—one that shows ordinary citizens can become extraordinary anchors in a crisis.

For Bola, the comfort was found in the circle of strangers who ensured he did not have to stand alone.



Inside Thaikkudam Bridge's exciting March 2026 Australian tour

INDIRA LAISRAM
@indira_laisram

Thaikkudam Bridge, the dynamic Indian fusion band known for blending classical ragas, folk tunes, heavy rock, and orchestral sounds, is heading back to Australia in March 2026, and this time, they're bringing something fresh.

I caught up with Vian Fernandes, the band's charismatic bassist and frontman, and Ashok Betty Nelson, their masterful rhythm guitarist, over Zoom to dive into what fans can expect from this much-anticipated tour.

"It's a really big honour," Nelson begins. "Going abroad is always a tricky thing. Leaving behind family, meeting new people... it's a test every time. But we've been lucky. This is our third Australian tour, but it's our first time at an Australian festival, the Adelaide Fringe. Our experience with festivals has always been great. It's a very big opportunity."

Fernandes shows palpable excitement too. "We are super excited for the festival." For him, the magic lies in the unknown crowd. "We get to play in front of an audience from different backgrounds, different genres. That is what is really exciting, to connect with a new audience."

He emphasises that the band itself is different now. "We have a very different sound. So many new songs. The Adelaide Fringe is the perfect stage for that."

Thaikkudam Bridge is a band that can't be easily described. They mix Indian classical music, folk songs, hard rock, and orchestral sounds to create an exciting and unique musical experience.

Nelson says, "With seven vocalists and a 13-member lineup, our performances stay fresh. It's like coffee for your ears, every song brings a new flavour, so the audience stays hooked."

So how does Fernandes, as the anchoring bassist and frontman, hold it all together? "We always have a picture," he admits, "but honestly, we go with a setlist and sometimes it does not go according to plan." The real conductor, he explains, is the crowd. "The energy they deliver... we make changes on stage. But for a festival, we are very clear about what we want to deliver."

He hints at an evolution. "If somebody watched us in 2013 or '14, from that time till now, there has been a big change. We're working on a new album, and this is going to be a sound-shifting moment."

For Nelson, the rhythm guitarist, these seismic shifts are the lifeblood of the performance. "What dictates everything is passion and being able to enjoy yourself on stage," he says. "Since we have multiple vocalists, each person brings a different flavour. The audience never gets bored.

"What the audience is going through, we are also going through," Ashok adds, a grin spreading. "When something gives the crowd goosebumps, the same thing happens to us on stage. As Vian always says, we have the best seats in the auditorium."

With members scattered from Mumbai to Kochi, the birth of a Thaikkudam Bridge song is an exercise in modern, collaborative chaos. "The right answer would be it all starts on WhatsApp," Fernandes laughs. A skeleton of a melody, a **<TURN TO #37>**



> We are super excited for the festival (Adelaide Fringe). We get to play in front of an audience from different backgrounds, different genres. That is what is really exciting, to connect with a new audience
>
> **VIAN FERNANDES**



> We formed a band in college, we didn't have a bassist... I said, 'Okay, fine, I'll play bass'
>
> **ASHOK BETTY NELSON**



CONTINUED FROM #35 voice note, a riff gets dropped into the group chat. If it catches fire, everyone begins building on it from their own corners of the country.

"Most of the time, it's Govind [Vinay, co-founder] or Ashok who come up with an idea," explains Fernandes. The pieces coalesce slowly until they finally meet for a rehearsal or, often, a soundcheck.

Nelson interjects, "We've actually had a couple of songs born on stage, where we just jammed." Fernandes agrees, "It's unpredictable. Just like our band."

This spirit of open-ended creation defined their last album, *Namah*, which featured collaborations with international legends like Guthrie Govan and Marco Minnemann. "First thing would be to be humble," says Nelson. "We never told them what to do. It was an open book... Listening to their parts for the first time was an experience in itself."

After releasing *Namah* just before the pandemic hit, the band had to pause live shows, which they say is the real heart of their connection with fans. "Live performances are where people really feel us," says Nelson. They're now working on a new album that promises to take their sound to a new level, but fans will have to wait for that surprise.

The conversation turns to their personal journeys. Fernandes' start with the bass was almost accidental. "We formed a band in college, we didn't have a bassist... I said, 'Okay, fine, I'll play bass.' It wasn't a choice I really wanted." But what began as a necessity became a love affair. "Over the years I've understood the beauty of the instrument... Every day is a crazy day, just knowing how much music there is to discover."

Nelson adds, "From my experience of watching him over 13 years, he constantly applies himself. He's learning new instruments... That's something I look up to."

His own path was rooted in rhythm from the age of four, starting with the mridangam. "Maybe it's because I started with a percussion instrument, but for me, rhythm is the right place. I enjoy my role... I don't have to do the flashy stuff." Fernandes is quick to add, "Other than playing rhythm guitar, Ashok also plays bass on stage for some of the songs." It's a band where roles fluidly merge.

As talk returns to Australia and the new album, the excitement resurfaces. "I can confidently say," says Nelson, "The sound we're about to unleash hasn't been heard before. It's a completely different leaf we've turned."

They recount the delightful surprise of past Australian tours, expecting non-Malayali crowds and finding a sea of homesick Keralites. "We prepare for a non-Malayali crowd," Nelson laughs, "but no one is non-Malayali!"

So, for the uninitiated Australian, what is Thaikkudam Bridge? Nelson says, "A multilingual, multi-genre band with an essence of metal, I guess." Fernandes has a simpler suggestion: "Watch the video for 'Navarasam'. It's a great storytelling piece. It captures our sound, genre, and cultural roots."

Their final message to fans, old and new, is straightforward. "Be there. Be the bridge. Let's have a crazy time together!"





Qld to deliver 20 supported homes for young mothers at risk of homelessness

OUR REPORTER
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The Queensland Government has announced plans to deliver 20 new purpose-built homes for young mothers and their children who are experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness, as part of a $30 million housing and support package across Brisbane, Ipswich, Townsville and Mackay.

The homes will be paired with on-site wraparound services aimed at providing early intervention support, stability and a pathway into longer-term housing. The programme is being delivered through partnerships with community housing and support organisations in each location.

According to the Government, the package is intended to address both housing access and the broader challenges faced by young families, including maintaining tenancies, staying connected to education or training, and accessing health and parenting support. The homes will remain dedicated to young mothers and their children, with support services embedded on site rather than delivered separately.

In Ipswich, the Lady Musgrave Trust will deliver 13 self-contained homes. The organisation says the model is designed to help young mothers build confidence, maintain secure housing and remain engaged with education and community services while raising their children.

Townsville will see four new homes delivered by Yumba-Meta Ltd, specifically for single First Nations mothers and their children. The project includes on-site support workers and case managers, with a focus on cultural safety and helping families transition into longer-term housing arrangements.

In Mackay, Connect Housing Group will construct three homes for young parents and children as part of a growing supported community housing precinct. The organisation says the development will support young families in building independence while remaining connected to local services.

In Brisbane, Mercy Community will provide accommodation alongside mental health and parenting support for vulnerable pregnant women and new mothers. The Brisbane programme is focused on supporting women during pregnancy and the early stages of caring for a newborn, a period service providers say is often marked by heightened vulnerability.

Housing Minister Sam O'Connor said the investment reflects the Government's approach to delivering homes with support built in, rather than treating housing and social services as separate challenges. He said stable accommodation combined with early intervention support can help prevent crisis situations and keep families together.

Community organisations involved in the programme have welcomed the funding, pointing to long waiting lists and growing demand for supported housing among young mothers. Lady Musgrave Trust chief executive Victoria Parker said the Ipswich homes would provide a foundation for young women working to create stability for their children, while Mercy Community acting chief executive Janet Rhodes said access to safe accommodation with specialist support allows new mothers to focus on their wellbeing and their baby's care.

Yumba-Meta chief executive Dushy Thangiah highlighted the importance of culturally informed support in Townsville, particularly for First Nations families who have experienced repeated housing insecurity. Connect Housing Group executive manager Darren Mew said the Mackay homes would offer young parents a secure base from which to build independence and long-term stability.

The Government has positioned the initiative as part of a broader response to housing pressure in Queensland, particularly for vulnerable groups. While the scale of the programme is modest relative to overall demand, housing advocates often point to supported models as a way to reduce repeat homelessness by addressing underlying issues alongside accommodation.

Construction timelines have not been detailed publicly, though the Government says delivery will proceed in partnership with the selected community organisations. Once completed, the homes are expected to provide immediate relief for young families while contributing to longer-term housing outcomes across the four regions.

Two Wheels, One Mission: Faster emergency care in Melbourne

OUR REPORTER *VICTORIA*
@the_indian_sun



For a decade, **Ambulance Victoria's (AV) motorcycle paramedics** have been weaving through Melbourne's busiest streets, delivering critical care when every second counts. Created to beat congestion and reach patients faster, this specialist unit is now a vital part of Victoria's emergency response network.

Operating mainly in Melbourne's CBD, these highly skilled paramedics also cover major events and nearby suburbs, reaching patients in hard-to-access spots. Their motorcycles carry modified ambulance gear—including defibrillators, medications, airway tools, and trauma supplies—enabling rapid, life-saving care.



Motorcycle paramedics are dispatched alongside traditional ambulances and often arrive first. They assess the scene, request extra resources if needed, or cancel ambulances en route to avoid wasting valuable resources.

"Sometimes call takers can't get all the details immediately, so sending a motorcycle paramedic quickly allows for on-the-spot assessment and frees up other crews if it's a less serious case," said AV Specialist Resources Team Manager Josh Tait.

The unit currently includes seven experienced paramedics, like Alex Ricco, who joined in July 2024 after a decade with AV. Alex highlights the unit's impact on both high- and low-acuity cases.

"We bring high-quality care directly to patients in places where ambulances can't park, getting potentially life-saving treatment to serious cases faster," he said. "We also triage less serious cases, ensuring patients get the right care—whether that means hospital transport or referral to other healthcare options."

Alex, a passionate motorcyclist, was drawn to the unit to combine his love for riding with his paramedic work. The team rides BMW GS900 motorcycles equipped with sirens, emergency lights, and panniers loaded with life-saving gear, bringing ambulance capabilities where four wheels can't go.

Josh Tait explains that motorcycles help overcome challenges common in congested areas: "They move through traffic more easily and access places like parks, bike paths, and tunnels."

Veteran paramedic Rob Mits, who joined the unit after 20 years on the road, said becoming a motorcycle paramedic requires advanced riding skills, with ongoing training and tests. "I love the job. It's busy but rewarding—sometimes we attend up to 15 cases a day."

Because motorcycle paramedics hand patients over to ambulance crews for transport, they're quickly available for the next call, often carrying a higher caseload than regular paramedics.

"The sooner an ambulance arrives—whether motorcycle or conventional—the sooner treatment begins. Especially in serious cases, every minute counts and faster response means better outcomes," Rob said.

Ambulance Victoria's motorcycle unit officially launched in November 2015 after a successful trial, and has been an essential part of emergency care in Melbourne ever since.

SEBI-ASIC tie-up could reshape financial regulation



***Dr. Sonia Khosa**'s new book advocates for enhanced India-Australia securities cooperation, comparing SEBI and ASIC to propose a strategic regulatory partnership roadmap*

BHUSHAN SALUNKE
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Dr Sonia Khosa, University of Sydney, launched her book, Deeper Strategic Collaboration in the Securities Sector: India and Australia on 13 November 2025 at ANU Law School, Canberra.

Her book, developed as part of her PhD thesis, examines how India and Australia can work together to strengthen financial regulation by comparing the roles of SEBI and ASIC against international securities standards. This accomplishment is all the more remarkable given that she completed it while raising two young children!

The book launch had speeches by Gopal Baglay, Gail Pearson, Pradeep Ramakrishnan, Arjun Prasad, Sunil J. Kadam, Prabhas Rath and Associate Professor Akshaya Kamalnath (moderator), followed by a panel discussion.

A Kashmiri Pandit by heritage, Sonia was born in Jammu and Kashmir and raised across India. She attended the prestigious Welham Girls' School in Dehradun and **<TURN TO #41>**





At the launch, Dr Sonia Khosa elaborated the core arguments and the roadmap, focusing on why and how India and Australia should build a structured securities-regulation partnership

CONTINUED FROM #40 earned her law degree from ILS Law College, Pune. Sonia began her career with SEBI in Mumbai, where she developed deep expertise in securities markets and gained global exposure through international regulatory collaborations. Nine years ago, she migrated to Australia, where these experiences laid the foundation for her PhD research and academic career.

Dr. Sonia Khosa serves as an interdisciplinary lecturer and researcher at the University of Sydney, focusing on strategic collaboration, regulatory design, and complex problem-solving in the financial and securities sectors. Her research explores cross-border cooperation, policy alignment, and institutional capabilities to enhance market integrity and build resilient financial systems.

In teaching, she spearheads interdisciplinary initiatives that unite students from varied fields with industry partners to tackle real-world challenges, emphasising higher-order thinking, workplace skills, and collaborative solutions.

Her wider interests encompass the evolution of regulation, digital transformation in financial governance, and evidence-based policies for greater transparency and accountability. She actively bridges academia, industry, and government to drive informed decision-making amid global changes.

At the launch, Dr Sonia Khosa elaborated the core arguments and the roadmap, focusing on why and how India and Australia should build a structured securities-regulation partnership. She explained how the two countries' complementary market structures and shared regulatory philosophies create a solid foundation for deeper cooperation in an era of globalised capital flows, digitalisation, and complex cross-border financial risks.

She explained the need for closer securities cooperation between India and Australia to be both strategically important and practically feasible, given their roles as Indo-Pacific democracies and their alignment with IOSCO principles on market integrity, investor protection, and systemic-risk awareness. This cooperation is positioned as a potential norm-setter that could influence wider regional and global regulatory standards.

The book compares the regulatory foundations of SEBI and ASIC, highlights core collaboration areas between the two, and lays out a phased roadmap for achieving these objectives while addressing the challenges involved.

Deeper, Strategic Collaboration in the Securities Sector: India and Australia *by Dr Sonia Khosa*

ISBN: 9781760467036

Price: $69.99

Where to buy: Amazon, Booktopia



Melbourne's Vasudeva Kriya Yoga wins India PM's Yoga Award

Rajendra Yenkannamoole receives the Prime Minister's Yoga Award from Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the WHO Global Summit on Traditional Medicine in New Delhi on 19 Dec

OUR REPORTER
@the_indian_sun

Melbourne-based organisation, Vasudeva Kriya Yoga, has been recognised on the global stage after being named among the recipients of India's Prime Minister's Yoga Awards.

The awards were conferred by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the second WHO Global Summit on Traditional Medicine in New Delhi, honouring individuals and organisations from seven countries for their outstanding contribution to the promotion and development of yoga.

Vasudeva Kriya Yoga was the only Australia-based organisation recognised, joining recipients from Egypt, South Korea, Croatia, the United States, Brazil and the United Kingdom. The full list of awardees included Amira Ahmed Fahmy Ibrahim (Egypt), Prof Geo Lyong Lee (South Korea), Yogacharya Jadranko Miklec (Croatia), Dr Karen Mustian (USA), Marcus Vinicius Rojo Rodrigues (Brazil), Vasudeva Kriya Yoga (Australia) and The British Wheel of Yoga (UK).

The Prime Minister's Yoga Awards reflect yoga's growing global appeal and its role in promoting health, harmony and wellbeing—particularly important in today's fast-paced world.

Vasudeva Kriya Yoga was recognised for its community-led approach and long-standing work across Melbourne and beyond under the guidance of its founder, Rajendra Yenkannamoole.

Originally from a small village, Yenkannamoole, on the border of Karnataka and Kerala in South India, Rajendra began practising yoga at the age of 10 under the guidance of Sri Yogeeshwar in Bengaluru. He later deepened his yogic training under his guru, Paramahansa Swami Maheshwaranandji. Alongside his spiritual journey, he holds master's degrees in Chemical Engineering and Business Administration.

Rajendra began teaching yoga in Melbourne in 2004 at the encouragement of Swami Ramaswarupanandaji, guided by the belief that knowledge should be shared for the benefit of society. Since then, he has conducted yoga classes across multiple locations in Melbourne, with all proceeds directed towards humanitarian charity projects around the world.

His work extends to hosting yoga workshops for elderly residents in aged-care homes, running sessions for children with special needs, and regularly conducting classes and seminars in schools and villages across India.

Vasudeva Kriya Yoga classes are designed to be inclusive, welcoming participants regardless of age, gender, physical ability or religion. Hundreds of people who have taken part in the programs have reported physical, mental, intellectual and spiritual benefits, with noticeable improvements in their day-to-day lives.

The recognition places Melbourne's wellness community firmly on the international map, highlighting the contribution of the Indian diaspora in Australia to preserving and sharing ancient traditions in a modern, multicultural society.



Alain Brunet // Photo from Facebook

When lingering trauma may signal PTSD and when to seek help

Trauma reactions are normal, but lasting symptoms need attention, says a leading PTSD expert urging early screening and support

OUR REPORTER
@the_indian_sun

Feeling unsettled, anxious or on edge after a traumatic event is common, and for most people those reactions ease with time. A leading PTSD researcher says the key question is not whether symptoms appear, but how long they last.

Professor Alain Brunet, Director of the National PTSD Research Centre at the University of the Sunshine Coast's Thompson Institute, says responses such as nightmares, intrusive thoughts, being easily startled, difficulty concentrating, emotional withdrawal or avoidance are all expected in the weeks following trauma.

He says people should allow themselves time to recover, as most will gradually return to their usual level of functioning. The concern arises when symptoms persist.

If these experiences continue for several weeks without improvement, Professor Brunet says it may be time to seek professional advice. Duration, rather than the presence of symptoms alone, is often the clearest signal that further support is needed.

As a first step, he points to a free, confidential pre-diagnostic screening tool that helps individuals assess whether their experiences meet the threshold to consider a formal PTSD assessment. The tool does not replace a diagnosis, which still needs to be made by a qualified health professional such as a GP, but it can help people decide whether to seek help rather than dismiss ongoing distress.

PTSD diagnoses have been increasing in Australia, a trend linked to repeated exposure to natural disasters such as floods and bushfires, alongside major public incidents that affect entire communities. Professor Brunet says events of this kind can leave lasting psychological effects, even among people who were not directly involved.

He stresses that immediate responses after trauma should focus on safety, connection and acknowledgement. Taking time to process what has happened, checking in with loved ones and slowly returning to daily routines can support recovery. Collective acts such as memorial services or laying flowers may also help people make sense of shared loss.

The National PTSD Research Centre conducts research, clinical trials and community outreach, and provides resources for people experiencing trauma. Among its current work is research into Reconsolidation Therapy, a treatment approach developed by Professor Brunet that aims to reduce the emotional impact of traumatic memories.

While there is no cure for PTSD, he says this therapy has shown promising results in clinical trials, with some studies reporting meaningful improvement for a majority of participants after a small number of short sessions. The approach has also been taught to clinicians working with people affected by war in Ukraine.

Professor Brunet emphasises that early recognition and support can make a real difference. For many, symptoms will ease naturally, but for those who continue to struggle, seeking help sooner rather than later may prevent distress from becoming entrenched.



Representational Image by National Cancer Institute on Unsplash

No GP? No Problem: What your chemist can treat now

Victoria's Chemist Care Now program expands, allowing pharmacists to treat school sores and resupply contraceptives, providing faster, free care and easing pressure on local doctors

OUR REPORTER
@the_indian_sun

Victorians can now have more everyday health conditions treated directly at their local pharmacy, making care faster, easier and free.

The Chemist Care Now program has expanded to include new treatments, allowing people to get help for common issues without needing a GP appointment—saving time for families and easing pressure on doctors so they can focus on more complex cases.

Parents can now have children treated for impetigo, commonly known as school sores, through participating pharmacies. With free consultations, this means quicker treatment and a faster return to childcare or school.

Women will also benefit from expanded access to reproductive and menopause care. Two additional hormonal contraceptive options—the injectable depot and the vaginal ring—can now be resupplied at pharmacies without a prescription.

From later next year, pharmacists will also be able to provide resupplies of hormone replacement therapy (HRT) for women experiencing menopause, an official press release said.

Over the next two years, the program will continue to grow, expanding to 22 treatments for common conditions. Participating pharmacists complete short-form training for each new service they offer, ensuring safe and consistent care.

The expansion builds on existing services already available through the program, including treatment for uncomplicated urinary tract infections, shingles and other skin conditions, travel vaccinations such as hepatitis A and B, and contraceptive pill resupply.

Since launching as a pilot, the program has delivered more than 66,000 services through over 800 pharmacies across Victoria, reflecting strong community uptake and demand for convenient care close to home.

Additional training pathways are also being introduced to support the program, including a new Graduate Certificate of Pharmacist Prescribing at Monash University, accredited by the Australian Pharmacy Council.

Chemist Care Now complements other healthcare access initiatives such as Urgent Care Clinics and the Victorian Virtual Emergency Department, helping more people get the right care, in the right place, sooner.

To find a participating pharmacy, visit betterhealth.vic.gov.au/about-chemist-care-now.

Minister for Health Mary-Anne Thomas said, "Expanding Chemist Care Now means pharmacists can treat more conditions, giving Victorians quicker access to free, convenient care.

"Adding school sores and more contraceptive options will make a real difference for families and women, helping people get treatment when they need it, close to home."



Atlantic salmon being checked for gill disease // Photo supplied by CSIRO

Common medicines tested to treat deadly salmon disease

Researchers are trialing common anti-inflammatory drugs to treat gill disease in farmed Atlantic salmon, aiming to find safer, more effective alternatives to current industry methods

OUR REPORTER
@the_indian_sun

An international team of researchers is testing whether common anti-inflammatory drugs could offer a better way to treat gill disease in farmed Atlantic salmon, which costs the global aquaculture industry millions each year.

The project, GILLMED, brings together researchers from CSIRO, Australia's national science agency, alongside Patogen, Moredun Scientific, Nautilus Collaboration and Mowi. It is funded by the Norwegian Seafood Research Fund (FHF), a CSIRO press release stated.

Complex gill disease (CGD) is a leading cause of fish death on salmon farms. It is caused by a mix of biological, husbandry and environmental factors, including parasite, bacteria, jellyfish and algae.

Current treatments for marine gill disorders include hydrogen peroxide and freshwater baths. These require handling of fish and are not always effective. New, less invasive and more reliable approaches are urgently needed.

Dr James Wynne, principal research scientist at CSIRO, said GILLMED would take a new approach by exploring well-known anti-inflammatory drugs already used in veterinary medicine to provide symptomatic relief for complex gill disease in farmed salmonids.

"We're committed to ensuring these treatments are safe—protecting fish health, supporting farmers, and protecting consumers," said Dr Wynne.

"Norwegian salmon farmers are deeply committed to maintaining good gill health in their fish. They allocate 0.3 per cent of all export income to research, and in close dialogue with the industry, FHF have prioritised novel research into anti-inflammatory drugs to control complex gill disease in Atlantic salmon," said Morten Lund, director R&D fish health and welfare at FHF.

"We hope the results will be useful for the aquaculture industry," he added.

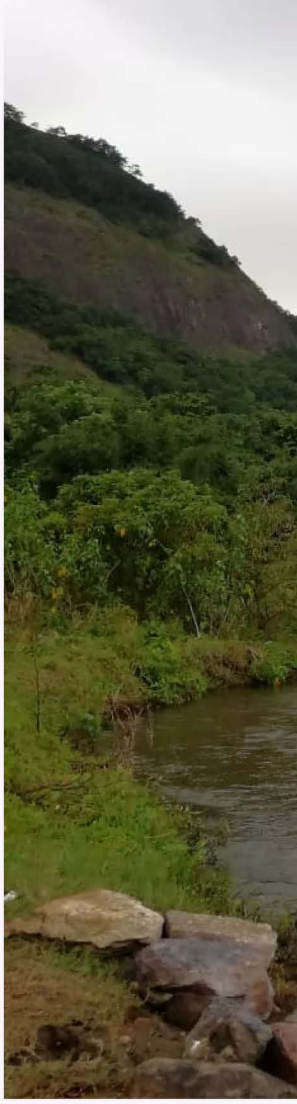
The project will assess the safety and effectiveness of four non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)—including meloxicam, ketoprofen and carprofen—for use as oral treatment. These drugs are already approved in food-producing animals in Norway and the UK but have not yet been tested in fish.

Researchers will test safe doses of the drugs, trial their effectiveness in treating gill disease in Atlantic salmon, study how the fish respond at a biological level, and explore whether the treatments could be used on commercial farms, the CSIRO release said.

The final results will be presented at the bi-annual Gill Health Initiative conference in 2027.

Going forward, GILLMED aims to support veterinarians and salmon producers with new treatment options by providing scientific evidence to inform regulatory approvals.

Rise of Slow Travel: How Indians are choosing depth over distance



DEEPIKA SAHU
@menondeepika

When Ananya Joshi, a Bengaluru-based 25-year-old graphic designer, recently took a 12-day trip to Gujarat, she wasn't ticking off a destination from her bucket list. Instead, she chose to spend immersive days exploring the intricately carved stepwells of Patan and Adalaj, Kutch's hand embroidery and textile traditions, local cuisines, and living cultural practices. She wasn't in a hurry and took time to interact with craftspeople at their own pace.

Joshi describes the experience as "slow, deeply intentional and purposeful."

Many Indian travellers are now consciously moving away from cookie-cutter vacations and choosing journeys that are slower and more purposeful. Slow travel is no longer just an emerging trend; it marks a paradigm shift towards more responsible, intentional and deeply personal forms of exploration.

Travel industry insiders note that in a post-COVID world—where mental and physical well-being have moved to the centre of lifestyle choices—travellers are increasingly seeking immersive, restorative and consciously paced journeys. There is a growing desire to mindfully engage with destinations rather than consume them in haste.

This shift is unfolding against the backdrop of India's growing prominence in the global tourism economy. As of 2025, India ranks as the world's eighth-largest tourism market, with the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) projecting it will become the fourth-largest within the next decade. This rapid expansion presents both an opportunity and a responsibility—to move beyond volume-driven tourism models and adopt approaches that balance economic growth with environmental sustainability and community well-being.

In this context, slow travel gains prominence. By encouraging longer stays, local consumption and deeper cultural immersion, it delivers high-value, low-impact tourism outcomes. The model supports sustainable livelihoods, reduces pressure on fragile ecosystems and enables a more equitable distribution of tourism benefits across regions and communities.

Industry experts also point to a shift away from crowded, mainstream tourist destinations. Instead, many travellers are seeking offbeat locations that offer lingering experiences infused with local flavour and authenticity. Lesser-known destinations in Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, the unexplored corners of Northeast India, coastal Maharashtra, Odisha, Jharkhand and Karnataka are steadily gaining popularity.

Speaking about their efforts to encourage slow travel, Sudarshan Bisht and Priyanka Jha, founders of Transformative 〈TURN TO #47〉



Exploring local markets and making connections make slow travelling special // Photo by Deepika Sahu



Homestays are gaining popularity among slow travellers in India // Photo by Deepika Sahu



Slow travel is all about being intentional and immersive // Photo by Deepika Sahu



Local craft traditions and interactions with crafts persons attract many slow travellers // Photo by Deepika Sahu

> This five-day immersive tour package, starting from Rishikesh or Dehradun, is designed by local villagers and takes travellers through the serene Jakhol village in the Himalayas

BISHT AND PRIYANKA JHA
TRANSFORMATIVE TRAVELLERS

《CONTINUED FROM #46》 Travellers, say, "Slow travel is about depth over distance and connections over checklists. This approach allows travellers to grasp local social and cultural nuances, fostering genuine connections with their surroundings. In a country as complex as India, it is an ideal way to engage with its rich diversity—a philosophy centred on exploring one place, one culture, at a time."

They have also recently launched Pahadi Experience, a programme designed to help travellers explore mountain life, culture and traditions at a relaxed pace. Sharing a blueprint of their curated slow-travel offerings, Bisht and Jha say, "Many travellers visit Uttarakhand seeking the majesty of the Himalayas but often miss the heart of the region—the local way of life. They rush through, sightseeing rather than soul-seeing. This long-weekend itinerary is a blueprint for a meaningful, affordable adventure designed to immerse travellers in the authentic culture of the mountains and its people."

"This five-day immersive tour package, starting from Rishikesh or Dehradun, is designed by local villagers and takes travellers through the serene Jakhol village in the Himalayas (Uttarkashi district, Uttarakhand)," they add.

"The slow traveller gets a chance to experience apple orchards, wooden architecture, handicrafts, local Pahadi food, scenic nature trails and mountain tops. Most importantly, they are hosted by local families, allowing close interaction with village life. Though short, the tour enables deep immersion, fostering an instant connection with nature and the local community."

Suchit Gupta, a Delhi-based consultant, recently spent 10 days in Odisha, deliberately giving popular tourist sites like Puri and Konark a miss. "I began my trip at Hirapur, next to 64 Yogini temple near Bhubaneswar, spending my early mornings meditating in the temple. After that, I travelled to Koraput and loved exploring the land, the people and the coffee. As a coffee lover, visiting the plantations and interacting with locals felt purposeful and deeply soul-satisfying. I had some of the most memorable meals in local homes. There was no pressure, no rush. For the first time while travelling, I felt I truly owned my time," he says.

India's domestic tourism sector is currently witnessing new highs. With improved infrastructure, better connectivity to remote regions and a renewed sense of national pride, Indians are increasingly choosing to explore their own diverse landscape. From coffee farm stays in Karnataka and culinary trails in Kerala and Punjab to monasteries in Sikkim, the beaches and temples of Odisha, and the mountain life of Himachal Pradesh, domestic travel is seeing a renewed surge.

Travel is now also being viewed as a form of self-care. Ahmedabad-based Bimal Mehta, who owns Travel Designer, an agency known for curating layered travel experiences, says, "The travel industry has undergone massive changes in the last few years. Travellers are now more open to experience-centric journeys. We are seeing growing interest in voluntary tourism, culinary tourism and craft tourism. People want to engage with destinations in a slower, more relaxed way. There is significant interest in places like Leh, Kashmir, Kerala and the North-East."

Slow travel is ultimately about soaking in layered experiences—and India's extraordinary diversity is offering travellers the space to pause, reflect and savour every moment.

***Deepika Sahu** has been a journalist for 30 years and she has worked with some of India's leading media houses. Right now, she is independently engaged in content creation and curation.*

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Bongosathi & Pradeep Tiwari Jointly Present
CHRISTMAS
WEST

Christmas in the West lights up Footscray Park



Footscray Park sparkled on 13 December as **Christmas in the West** brought families together with food, music, rides and fireworks

OUR REPORTER
@the_indian_sun

Footscray Park took on a festive glow on 13 December as Christmas in the West unfolded across the Eastern Lawn, drawing families from Maribyrnong and surrounding suburbs for an evening built around food, music, rides and fireworks.

The event featured more than 50 market and service stalls, over 20 food vendors, 10 rides and a packed program of activities for children, including Santa photos and camel rides. Fifteen group performances filled the stage through the evening, ranging from Christmas carols **<TURN TO #51>**



> What an unforgettable day and evening at Christmas in the West, held at the beautiful and historic Footscray Park. Seeing families, children, elders and friends come together in this iconic space was truly special
>
> **CR PRADEEP TIWARI**









<CONTINUED FROM #49> to dance and live band sets, before fireworks closed the night over the Maribyrnong River.

An official ceremony early in the evening brought together elected representatives and community leaders, with speeches delivered by Daniel Mulino, Katie Hall MP, Mathew Hilakari MP and Maribyrnong Mayor Mohamed Semra. The gathering marked the first Christmas celebration of this scale at Footscray Park, a point reflected in remarks shared afterwards by Cr Pradeep Tiwari, who led the event.

"What an unforgettable day and evening at Christmas in the West, held at the beautiful and historic Footscray Park," he said. "Seeing families, children, elders and friends come together in this iconic space was truly special and something I will always be proud of."

Tiwari thanked the attending MPs and councillors, saying, "I would like to sincerely thank our special guests and dignitaries for joining us and showing their continued support for our community. Your presence and encouragement mean a great deal."

He also acknowledged the role of community organisers behind the scenes. "A very heartfelt thank you to Rabindra Nath Shaw and the entire Bongosathi team. Thank you for believing in and sharing this vision with me to bring more large-scale, inclusive community events to Footscray Park," he said, adding that their "leadership, commitment and tireless work behind the scenes were central to making this festival a success."

Volunteers and workers across the site were also singled out. "Thank you to all the volunteers, performers, stallholders, food truck operators, ride operators, technicians, safety teams and everyone who worked on the ground," Tiwari said. "These events are built on passion and long hours, and your contribution was invaluable."

Addressing questions around funding, he said, "For clarity and transparency, I would also like to share that this event was funded entirely by myself, Bongosathi, community members, sponsors, and the food and market stallholders who participated. No grants or Council funding were received for this event."

As crowds moved between performances, rides and food stalls, the emphasis remained on accessibility and shared space. "This was the first Christmas celebration of this scale at Footscray Park, and it felt truly historic because of the people who showed up with joy, patience and community spirit," Tiwari said.

Reflecting on the broader meaning of the night, he added, "This is a powerful example of what can be achieved when a community comes together with a shared purpose and belief in one another. From the performances, to the rides, Santa photos, markets and fireworks, this night was about togetherness, culture and celebration."



Sanskriti's Kathak ghungroo belles spin enchanting chakkars



Sanskriti School of Performing Arts captivated Sydney with **'Utsav 2025'**, a graceful annual Kathak showcase led by Guru Sakshi Kumar

BHUSHAN SALUNKE
@the_indian_sun

Sanskriti, the School of Indian Performing Arts presented Utsav 2025, its annual Kathak showcase, on 6 December 2025, at Pennant Hills Community Centre in Sydney.

Led by Guru Sakshi Kumar, a trained Kathak exponent from Kathak Kendra under Pt. Jai Kishan Maharaj (son of Pt. Birju Maharaj), the event featured student performances across age groups, celebrating the grace, rhythm, and traditions of Kathak.

Held across Sydney locations like St. Ives, Hornsby, and Westmead, **<TURN TO #55>**



The guest appearance by Vidushi Uma Dograji, 69-year-old veteran artist from India and Central Sangeet Natak Academy Awardee, elevated the evening with her mesmerising Kathak



Guru Sakshi Kumar presented a commanding solo, using the Drona-Ekalavya storyline complete with the forest scene, the rejection by Guru Drona, Ekalvaya's self-practice with clay idol of his Guru, and Ekalavya's ultimate sacrifice of this thumb as gurudakshina



<CONTINUED FROM #53> Sanskriti fosters Indian classical dance roots among the new generation, earning acclaim for its inclusive classes and professional commitment. Utsav 2025 reinforced the school's role in Sydney's vibrant performing arts scene, drawing families for a joyful celebration of tradition and skill.

Students from beginners to advanced levels displayed intricate footwork, expressive abhinaya, and tarana compositions, reflecting Sakshi Kumar's patient, detailed teaching praised by parents for inspiring dancers.

The guest appearance by Vidushi Uma Dograji, 69-year-old veteran artist from India and Central Sangeet Natak Academy Awardee, elevated the evening with her mesmerising Kathak. Vidushi Uma Dograji delivered the Shiv Stuthi with intricate footwork, and expressive abhinaya that captivated the audience. Her performance highlighted technical precision and emotional depth in the cosmic dance of Shiva. Her piece about Krishna's flirtations with the gopis was a delight to watch

Uma Dograji conducted a Kathak workshop for children and adults on 7 December in Hornsby.

Guru Sakshi Kumar, presented a commanding solo, using the Drona-Ekalavya storyline complete with the forest scene, the rejection by Guru Drona, Ekalvaya's self-practice with clay idol of his Guru, and Ekalavya's ultimate sacrifice of this thumb as gurudakshina. A touching tribute to Ekalavya's dedication to his guru and to guru-shishya tradition!

Popular Kathak-based pieces popularised in Bollywood, including *Kahe Chhed Chhed Mohe* and *Taal Se Taal Mila*, were presented with elegance and refinement.

The costumes enhanced the performances: lehenga paired with a fitted choli and churidar, often topped with a dupatta or odhni scarf draped over the shoulder & with skirts designed to flare dramatically during spins (chakkars). The ghungroos produced rhythmic sounds, complemented by jewellery like maang tikka, jhumkas, kamarbandh, bangles, and long necklaces.

The program concluded with a group performance followed by award of certificates to the students

Utsav 2025 left Sydney's audience spellbound by Sakshi Kumar's Sanskriti's masterful fusion of tradition, technique, and youthful passion in Kathak artistry.









Mārgam leads the way in Bharata Natyam excellence

Mārgam Centre for Arts in Sydney recently dazzled audiences with **'Ananya 2025'**, its vibrant annual student Bharatanatyam concert celebrating classical Indian artistry

BHUSHAN SALUNKE
@the_indian_sun

Mārgam Centre for Arts was founded in 2019 by **Shruthy Ramamurthi** with a vision to nurture talent through structured and holistic training in two sacred Indian traditions—Bharatanatyam and Yoga.

An accomplished Bharatanatyam dancer, dedicated teacher, and committed Yoga practitioner, Shruthy began her classical dance journey at the age of four. With over two decades of experience, she brings a blend of discipline, creativity, and cultural authenticity to her teaching.

Based in Sydney, Shruthy serves as the Founder and Artistic Director of Mārgam Centre for Arts—an institution devoted to delivering high-quality Indian arts education that is inclusive and accessible to learners of all ages and backgrounds.

What sets Shruthy's teaching apart is her seamless integration of dance and Yoga. She emphasises strength, flexibility, mindfulness, and breath awareness—cultivating not only physical endurance but also mental clarity and emotional resilience. Through her approach, she strives to inspire a lifelong appreciation of Bharatanatyam and Yoga, encouraging students to find joy in learning, commitment in practice, and a deeper connection to the spiritual essence of these timeless art forms.

On 15 November 2025, Mārgam Centre for Arts held its annual student Bharatha Natyam concert, Ananya 2025 at Girraween High School showcasing over 60 young dancers in a vibrant celebration of rhythm, devotion, and classical Indian artistry.

The evening began with an invocation song by Guru Chitra Nagraj, lamp lighting, and traditional slokamalas invoking Ganesha, Saraswati, Durga, and Nataraja from the Natyashastra.

The first half featured nine junior items like Dolayam (Vishnu's swing), **<TURN TO #59>**







The performance by the junior students, highlighted precise footwork, expressive mudras, and traditional repertoire







CONTINUED FROM #57 Ambe Ambike (Durga praise), Gajavadana Beduve (Ganesha), Vara Veena (Saraswati), Kaliyugavaradhan (Murugan), Swagatham Krishna, and Ranjani Mala, emphasising rhythm, abhinaya, and devotion. The performance by the junior students, highlighted precise footwork, expressive mudras, and traditional repertoire that reflected the school's holistic training approach.

The highlight arrived in the second half with the thematic piece Vaahana Nrithya Vandana, a dynamic group presentation blending technical mastery and storytelling, which captivated the audience with its energy and cultural depth.

This unique segment creatively interpreted six vahana stories: Saptashva (Surya's seven horses symbolising time and chakras), Nandi (Shiva's bull as righteous protector), Garuda (Vishnu's eagle battling Nagas for nectar), Simha (Durga's lion embodying controlled strength), Mooshika (Ganesha's mouse from cursed musician Krauncha, highlighting playful divine burden-lightening), and Mayil (Murugan's peacock from demon Surapadman, signifying valor and renewal). Each used Carnatic compositions reimagined with jathis, footwork, and narratives to blend mythology, culture, and artistry.

Chief guests Manjula Vishwanath & Councillor Srini Pillamari attended the event and praised the efforts of the school in promoting Bharata Natyam. Guru Chitra Nagraj & Meena Srinivasan also graced the occasion.

Anand Rao excelled as the Master of Ceremonies for Ananya 2025, delivering engaging narration that seamlessly wove cultural context, mythology, and event flow together. His introductions to each performance, from slokamalas to the Vaahana Nritya Vandana segment, kept the audience engaged and played a pivotal role in maintaining the event's smooth flow.

The program concluded with a grand Mangalam, uniting all performers in harmonious unity. Shruthy Ramamurthi's direction shone through, fostering discipline and joy among dancers of all ages while making Bharatanatyam accessible in Sydney's diverse community. Families filled the venue, creating an electric atmosphere of pride and cultural connection.

This annual event reaffirms Mārgam's role in nurturing the next generation of Bharatanatyam artists.





Australia names squad for U19 World Cup title defence

Defending champions Australia announce balanced 15-player squad for the 2026 Under-19 Cricket World Cup in Namibia and Zimbabwe



Aryan Sharma



John James



Oliver Peake

OUR REPORTER
@the_indian_sun

Australia has confirmed its **15-player squad** for the **ICC Under-19 Men's Cricket World Cup** in 2026, a tournament that will take the team through Namibia and Zimbabwe from mid-January to early February. The side arrives as defending champions, carrying the usual weight of expectation along with a captain in Oliver Peake who has already stood out in national and pathway competitions.

Selectors have chosen a blend of familiar performers and emerging prospects. Three uncapped players, Naden Cooray, Nitesh Samuel and William Taylor, have been added to a group that has already been tested against quality opposition in recent months. Their inclusion hints at a willingness to trust form and potential rather than leaning solely on experience.

The squad **<TURN TO #61>**

> We're delighted to announce a strong and well-balanced squad for the ICC Under-19 World Cup. Our focus has been on selecting a group with complementary skill sets that provide the best chance of success in tournament

TIM NIELSEN, HEAD COACH

<CONTINUED FROM #60> spans clubs and states across the country, reflecting the breadth of talent coming through district and grade systems. Beyond Peake, the group includes Kasey Barton, Jayden Draper, Ben Gordon, Steven Hogan, Thomas Hogan, John James, Charles Lachmund, Will Malajczuk, Hayden Schiller, Aryan Sharma and Alex Lee Young.

Head Coach Tim Nielsen said confidence in the group was built on recent performances and the balance of roles within the squad. "We're delighted to announce a strong and well-balanced squad for the ICC Under-19 World Cup. Our focus has been on selecting a group with complementary skill sets that provide the best chance of success in tournament. The players named have impressed with their performances during the U19 series against India in September and at the recent National U19 Championship in Perth. It's an exciting group, some have already experienced senior training environments, while others are progressing rapidly through our pathway. The World Cup is a fantastic opportunity for these young cricketers to showcase their talent and test themselves against the best in the world."

Cricket Australia's Head of National Development, Sonya Thompson, said the squad had the right mix to carry Australia through a demanding schedule. "The squad combines experience with fresh energy, including three new faces who will bring added depth and enthusiasm. This is a fantastic opportunity for these emerging players to showcase their skills on the global stage. Our players will be supported by an exceptional team of staff, ensuring they have every chance to perform and grow throughout the tournament."

Australia will play group matches against Ireland, Japan and Sri Lanka, beginning on 16 January in Windhoek. Warm-up games in Namibia earlier that month will help settle combinations before the World Cup opens. The tournament moves across two countries during the Super Six stage and into the knockouts, with the final set for 6 February at Harare Sports Club.

The squad will travel with an experienced coaching and support team. Nielsen will be joined by assistant coaches Luke Butterworth and Travis Dean, providing continuity for players who have come through the recent national pathway programmes.

The focus now shifts to preparation in early January, where conditions, opposition analysis and internal competition will shape Australia's approach. The broader cricket public will look for signs of how the next generation handles a world tournament so soon after the last group brought the trophy home. The coming weeks should give a clearer sense of whether this squad can follow that path.

AUSTRALIA MEN'S U19 SQUAD

- Oliver Peake © (Geelong District CC/VIC)
- Kasey Barton (Mosman CC/NSW)
- Naden Cooray (Parramatta CC/NSW)
- Jayden Draper (Valley District CC/QLD)
- Ben Gordon (Sunshine Coast Scorchers CC/QLD)
- Steven Hogan (Sandgate-Redcliffe District CC/QLD)
- Thomas Hogan (Ginninderra CC/ACT)
- John James (Parramatta CC/NSW)
- Charles Lachmund (Ipswich Hornets CC/QLD)
- Will Malajczuk (Subiaco Floreat CC/WA)
- Nitesh Samuel (Parramatta CC/NSW)
- Hayden Schiller (Northern Jets District CC/SA)
- Aryan Sharma (Carlton CC/VIC)
- William Taylor (St George CC/NSW)

Alex Lee Young (Randwick Petersham CC/NSW)

JOHN JAMES

AUSTRALIA FIXTURES IN ICC U19 WORLD CUP 2026

- 16 January: Australia v Ireland, Namibia Cricket Ground, Windhoek
- 20 January: Australia v Japan, Namibia Cricket Ground, Windhoek
- 23 January: Sri Lanka v Australia, Namibia Cricket Ground, Windhoek
- 24 January: A4 v D4, HP Oval, Windhoek
- 25 January: Super Six A1 v D3, Namibia Cricket Ground, Windhoek
- 25 January: Super Six D2 v A3, HP Oval, Windhoek
- 26 January: Super Six D1 v A2, Namibia Cricket Ground, Windhoek
- 28 January: Super Six, A1 v D2, Harare Sports Club, Harare
- 29 January: Super Six D3 v A2, Queens Sports Club, Bulawayo
- 30 January: Super Six D1 v A3, Harare Sports Club, Harare
- 03 February: First semi-final, Queens Sports Club, Bulawayo
- 04 February: Second semi-final, Harare Sports Club, Harare
- 06 February: Final, Harare Sports Club, Harare



Sydney Thunder Fan Day lights up Cricket Central







OUR REPORTER
@the_indian_sun

Sydney Thunder brought the excitement of cricket to life with a spectacular Fan Day at Cricket Central on 14 December.

The event was a celebration of community, cricket, and culture, drawing fans from across Sydney for an unforgettable experience.

Young fans had the rare opportunity to **❮TURN TO #63❯**





Adding a flavourful twist to the festivities, fans enjoyed complimentary South Asian delicacies such as Papdi Chaat and rolls, along with refreshing, weather-friendly sweet lassi & chai

CONTINUED FROM #62 play alongside their Thunder heroes, creating memories that will last a lifetime.

The day was packed with fun activities, including face painting, the ever-popular Thunder Thorn mascot, and chances to grab autographs and photos with the players before the event concluded.

Adding a flavourful twist to the festivities, fans enjoyed complimentary South Asian delicacies such as Papdi Chaat and rolls, along with refreshing, weather-friendly sweet lassi and aromatic masala chai, which perfectly complemented the vibrant atmosphere.

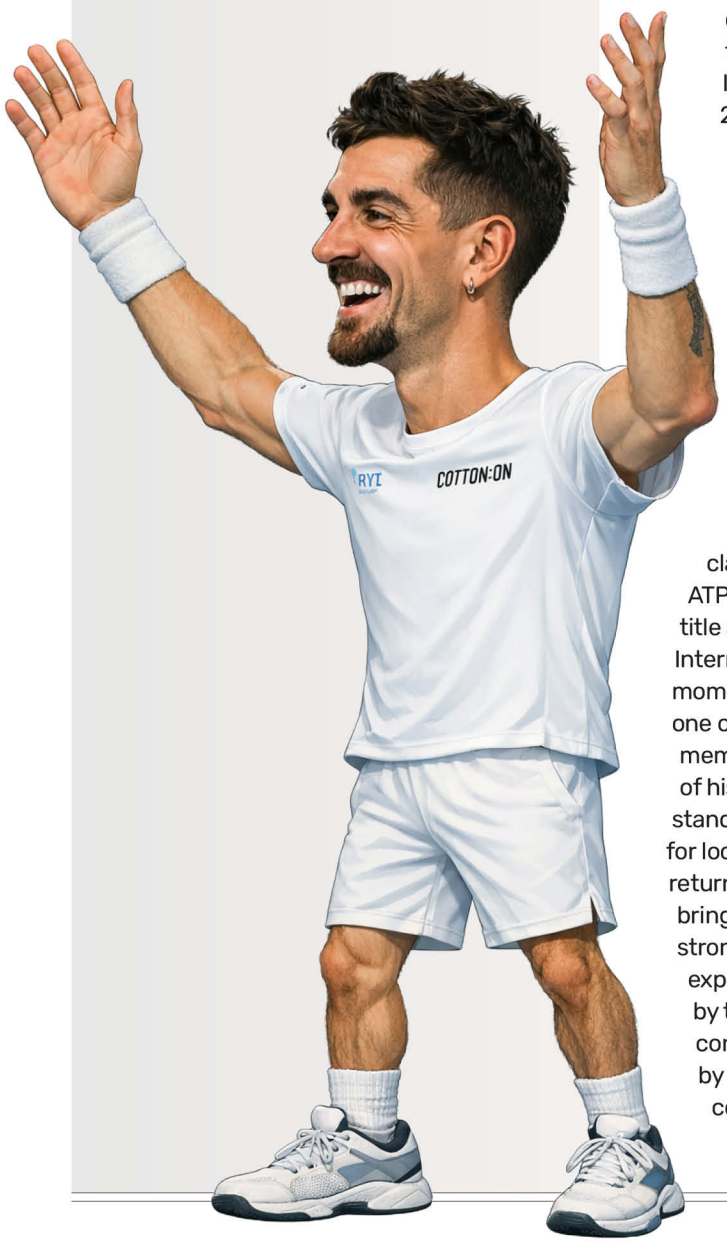
Sydney Thunder's Fan Day wasn't just about cricket; it was about bringing people together, celebrating diversity, and inspiring the next generation of players. Judging by the smiles and excitement, the event was a resounding success and an excellent start to the season.

Thanasi Kokkinakis set for Adelaide return with wildcard entry



OUR REPORTER
@the_indian_sun

Thanasi Kokkinakis will return to familiar territory next summer, with the South Australian confirmed for the Adelaide International 2026 after receiving a wildcard into the tournament.



The hometown favourite is no stranger to success at The Drive. In 2022, Kokkinakis claimed his first ATP Tour singles title at the Adelaide International, a moment that remains one of the most memorable chapters of his career and a standout highlight for local fans. His return next January brings with it a strong sense of expectation, shaped by that emotional connection and by the support he consistently draws from Adelaide crowds.

This year's men's draw is shaping up as a competitive ATP 250 field. World number one Novak Djokovic and British star Jack Draper, currently ranked inside the top ten, headline the line-up. They are joined by top-20 players Alejandro Davidovich Fokina, Jiri Lehecka and Tommy Paul, along with fellow Australian Alexei Popyrin. Against that backdrop, Kokkinakis faces a challenging path, even with the familiarity of home conditions on his side.

The women's competition is equally strong, with several of the world's leading players confirmed to compete in Adelaide. Madison Keys, Jessica Pegula, Mirra Andreeva, Ekaterina Alexandrova, Belinda Bencic, Clara Tauson, Emma Navarro and Paula Badosa are all set to feature, offering spectators a chance to see some of the sport's most recognisable names early in the season.

Tournament organisers are also placing renewed focus on the broader event experience. An expanded Kids' Day will open the competition, aiming to build on the strong family attendance seen in recent years. After selling out in both 2024 and 2025, organisers are encouraging families to secure tickets early, with expectations high that demand will again be strong.

That confidence is supported by early ticket sales. More than 28,000 fans have already secured their seats for the tournament, which runs from 12 to 17 January 2026. Tickets are available from $10, with free entry for children at selected sessions, positioning the event as one of the more accessible stops on the Australian summer calendar.

Tourism Minister Zoe Bettison said Kokkinakis' return adds to the appeal of an already strong line-up. She pointed to his past performances at The Drive as a defining feature of the Adelaide International and described his presence as a boost for both the event and the state's sporting profile. Bettison also highlighted the draw of seeing leading international players in Adelaide, noting that early ticket sales reflect sustained public interest.

Adelaide International Tournament Director Alicia Molik echoed that sentiment, describing Kokkinakis as a player who lifts the atmosphere whenever he takes to the court. She said his connection with the tournament and the local crowd often brings out his best tennis, making him a key drawcard for spectators. Molik added that the decision to award him a wildcard reflected both his history at the event and the energy he brings to the competition.

The Adelaide International forms part of a busy summer period for South Australia, sitting alongside events such as the Santos Tour Down Under, LIV Golf Adelaide, Adelaide Fringe, WOMADelaide and AFL Gather Round. For the state, the tournament continues to play a role in attracting visitors and showcasing Adelaide as a host city for major international sport.

For Kokkinakis, the wildcard offers another chance to build momentum on home soil against high-level opposition. While the field presents a stern test, his past success at the venue ensures his return will be closely watched by fans and players alike when the tournament gets underway in January.

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- Anniversary celebration, gratitude & reflections
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- Social connection activities & friendly conversations
- Light music with cultural touches
- Community lunch to end the morning on a warm note

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