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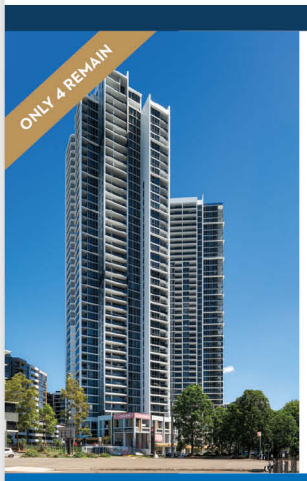
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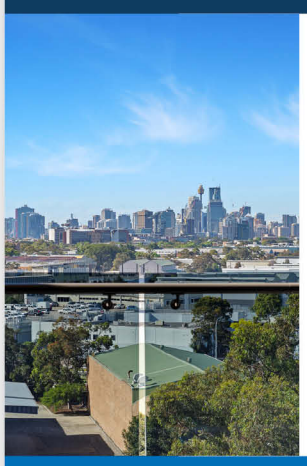


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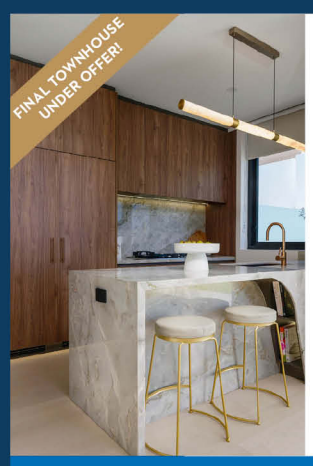


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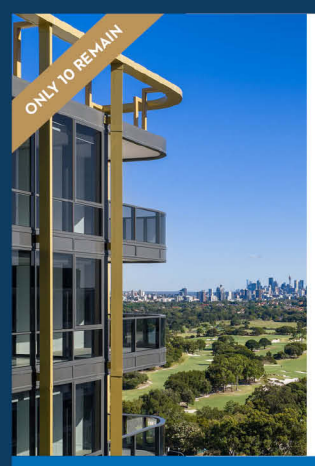


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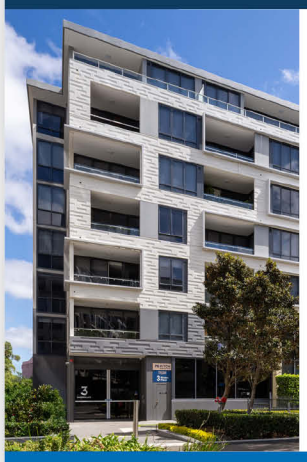


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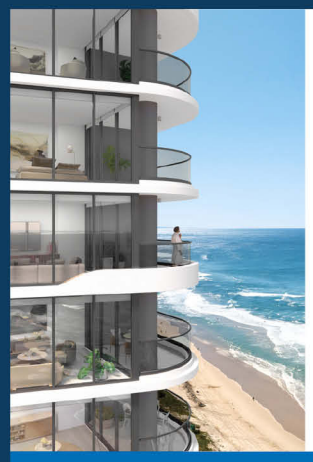


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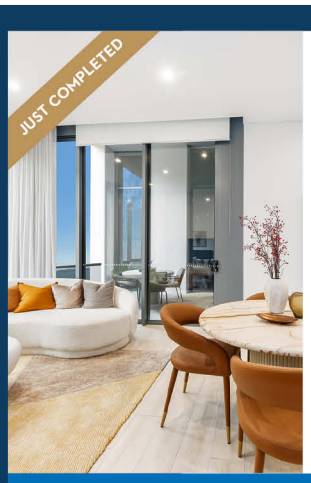
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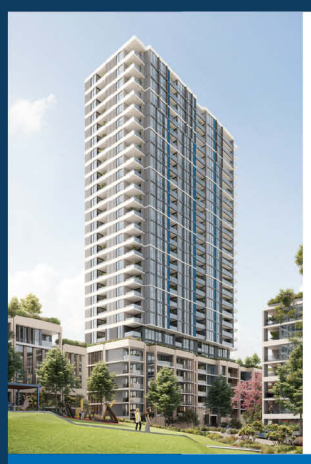
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EDITOR'S NOTE

When Delivery Matters More Than Declarations

Dear Readers,



February is when the year stops announcing itself and starts demanding results. This edition is produced for that phase.

In Victoria, the state government's $33 million investment in youth mental health and early intervention is a reminder that public policy, when done early, is cheaper and more humane than crisis management. The expansion of the Community Forensic Youth Mental Health Service, new initiatives through the Violence Reduction Unit, and funding for culturally specific clinicians and employment pathways signal a clear shift in approach. Trauma, mental ill health and disengagement are being treated as causes to be addressed, rather than consequences to be punished. The logic is straightforward. Young people supported early are less likely to enter the justice system later. These are system-level decisions with effects that will be felt for years.

That emphasis on long-term capacity, rather than short-term optics, defines the choices examined across this edition.

The AFL's engagement with India is one example of how institutions are thinking beyond headlines. Australian rules football has been played there since 2008, but the current focus is on scale and structure. Participation across multiple states, Hindi-language broadcasts, the Cultural Heritage Series and targeted diaspora engagement point to an organisation investing patiently rather than opportunistically. The AFL's stated ambition to reach one million participants by 2033 will depend less on novelty and more on whether the systems being built now can sustain interest over time. For Indian Australians, this also speaks to recognition at home, not just growth abroad.

Cultural institutions are navigating a similar terrain. Indigenous Australian artist and designer Grace Lillian Lee's presence at the India Art Fair in New Delhi, supported by the Australian High Commission, reflects a more deliberate approach to cultural diplomacy. Her participation places First Nations fashion and textile practice within a global art market as serious contemporary work, grounded in knowledge systems and lineage, and backed by institutional intent. Cultural exchange gains credibility when it is structured.

At the community level, this edition also documents the work that continues largely without formal support. The cover story on Lalitha Narayanan shows what it takes to build cultural infrastructure from the ground up. Teaching Bharatanatyam alongside full-time work, hiring community halls, and sustaining a school over many years requires discipline and endurance. These efforts are often praised as resilience. They are also indicators of gaps. When cultural and educational work depends almost entirely on individual sacrifice, sustainability becomes uncertain. Strong communities cannot rely on goodwill alone.

Politics and public communication sit under similar strain. Several stories in this edition point to how social media, global narratives and changing news consumption habits are reshaping political understanding within the Indian Australian community. As mainstream news shifts behind paywalls and targeted engagement weakens, people turn to fragmented online sources and multicultural media to interpret local politics. The result is not disengagement, but confusion. Overseas political language is absorbed without context, and local distinctions blur.

This is not a problem communities can solve on their own. Political parties and public institutions that reduce engagement or assume messages will travel unaided create their own disconnects.

Communication is not an accessory to policy. It is part of its delivery. February offers a test of whether that delivery can keep pace with reality.

Housing supply remains tight. Inflation pressures have not fully eased. Expectations of public services remain high. As Victoria moves towards its state election later this year, shifting poll sentiments, including increased support for One Nation, point to a more contested political environment.

South Australia will head to the polls first, with early voting beginning in March 2026 and polling day later that month, while Victoria's election will follow in November. Questions around immigration, identity and economic pressure are likely to intensify, and we will continue to cover and interrogate them. The task now is alignment between policy, practice and lived reality.

Best wishes,
SIDDHARTH SURESH

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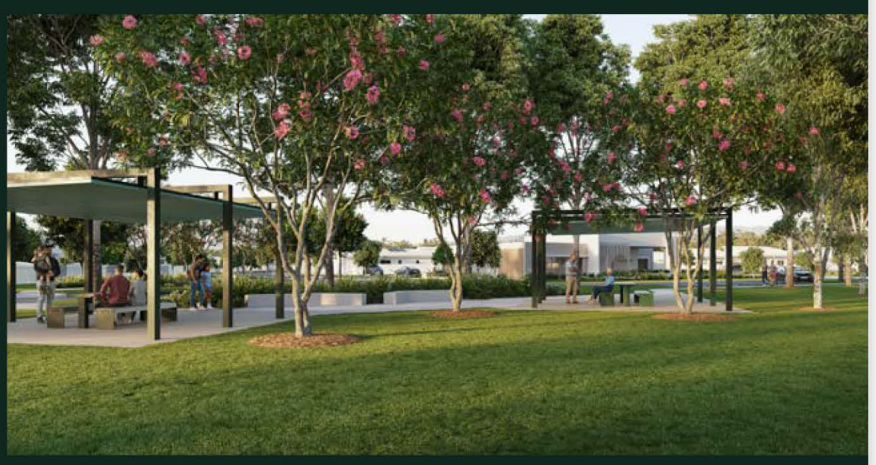
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The journey of Tamil Festival Australia

INDIRA LAISRAM
@indira_laisram

K Sivasuthan remembers when **Thai Pongal** in Melbourne started as a small gathering in the outer south-eastern suburbs at Balla Balla Community Centre, Cranbourne, back in 2011.

As the years passed, a simple realisation took root: this could be something much bigger. It could become a united effort for the entire Tamil community—not just to celebrate, but to proudly showcase their identity and the rich variety of their art forms.

"This is one of the longest surviving civilisations in the world," Sivasuthan says. "We have something to share."

A turning point came in 2019, when local Tamil groups formally united. They renamed the event Tamil Festival Australia and moved it to a central location, reflecting a community now spread "in all four directions" of the city.

Melbourne's Tamil community is remarkably diverse, with roots in Tamil Nadu, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Malaysia, South Africa, and beyond. Its members follow different faiths such as Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, but the festival brings them all together.

When COVID-19 arrived, the festival adapted without stopping. "We built a virtual platform," says Sivasuthan. "People could still 'enter' online and feel part of the celebration."

Now, the festival has grown into a major multicultural event. In fact, it has grown to become the largest Thai Pongal celebration in Australia, says Sivasuthan. Its importance to Victoria has been recognised with state government funding—$100,000 annually from 2024 through 2027. Last year, around 7,000 people attended.

This year, the festival will bring colour, music, and flavour to Event Central at Caribbean Park in Scoresby on Sunday, 25 January, from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.

It's a celebration of Thai Pongal, Tamil Heritage Month, respect for nature, and Australia's cultural diversity. "This is a festival for everyone," Sivasuthan says. "It's about sharing our heritage and creating a space for intercultural appreciation."

That's why, **<TURN TO #11>**



K Sivasuthan, one of the driving forces behind Tamil Festival Australia's journey from a local celebration to a multicultural event // Photo supplied

CONTINUED FROM #10 alongside Tamil performances, this year's festival will also feature Chinese cultural artists, highlighting the universal themes of harvest and thanksgiving. "These traditions connect us," he adds. "Bringing them together creates space to mingle and celebrate what we share."

Sivasuthan's journey mirrors the festival's growth. He migrated from Sri Lanka in 2005 and, like many parents, became involved through his children's Tamil language school. Starting as a volunteer, he later helped launch community projects and co-founded the Casey Tamil Manram group. Though the festival began as its initiative, it's now a collective effort, with around 25 Tamil community organisations involved since 2020.

At the heart of the festival will be the Community Pongal ritual, where families will cook sweet rice in clay pots as an offering of thanks. Attendees can also browse over 70 food and craft stalls, try traditional sports, or join workshops in making garlands or kolam, intricate rice flour art drawn on the ground.

The day will also feature friendly, non-competitive games like tug-of-war and sadakudu (kabaddi), which have been taught to kids in suburbs like Berwick and Dandenong in the weeks leading up to the event. "There are no champions, every participant is encouraged," Sivasuthan says.



Later, a live music show with singers from India and Sri Lanka will add a concert atmosphere to the afternoon.

The festival's name itself holds meaning. Thai is the Tamil calendar's first month. Pongal means "to overflow"—symbolising abundance and joy. "It represents overflowing with gratitude," Sivasuthan explains.

This idea has inspired local Tamil groups to frame January as Tamil Heritage Month, organising events throughout the month since 2019. Sivasuthan points to Canada, where January is officially proclaimed as Tamil Heritage Month, as a model. "In Australia, we're working toward that recognition, too," he says.

Ultimately, the festival shows that recognition for migrant communities isn't just given—it's built from within, through persistence, unity, and the simple choice to keep celebrating.







A shot at $11,000: New Swami Vivekanand scholarship announced

OUR REPORTER
@the_indian_sun

A major new scholarship worth $11,000 was announced at **Yuwa Diwas 2026**, a community cultural evening organised by the Vivekanand Society of Australia, held in Melbourne.

The Society will award the Swami Vivekanand Scholarship at Yuwa Diwas 2027, scheduled for 23 January 2027. Details on eligibility and how to apply will be announced soon through the Society's Facebook page.

Yuwa Diwas 2026 brought together community members, dignitaries, artists and young performers for an evening centred on the theme "Imprisoned by Freedom" over the weekend. The program explored the idea that while nations celebrate freedom, it is always guided by responsibility, laws and moral values, and that true freedom is ultimately spiritual.

The evening opened with the Australian and Indian national anthems, marking 26 January, a date that holds significance as both Australia Day and ❮TURN TO #13❯



CG Anish Rajan was particularly impressed by the Society's Sishu Mandir program, which runs weekly classes focused on character building for children

<CONTINUED FROM #12> India's Republic Day. This was followed by lamp lighting and the felicitation of chief guests.

Speaking at the event, Yogesh Bhatt, Founder and President of the Vivekanand Society of Australia, reflected on the **<TURN TO #14>**









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TAFE VICTORIA









Victorian Opposition Leader **Jess Wilson** acknowledged the Indian community's contribution to Victoria and said Melbourne would not be the same without it

CONTINUED FROM #13 deeper meaning of freedom and responsibility. He recalled the sacrifice of Hakiqat Rai as an example of inner strength and spiritual freedom even under oppression.

Addressing young people, Bhatt described them as the "eyes and ears of the community" and urged them to speak openly with parents, teachers and elders about issues affecting them. He cautioned about the misuse of technology and social media, stressing the importance of guidance, trust and open communication to ensure youth safety and wellbeing.

India's newly appointed Consul General in Melbourne, Anish Rajan, praised the Vivekanand Society of Australia for its contribution to the community, saying its work "speaks volumes." He said he was particularly impressed by the Society's Sishu Mandir program, which runs weekly classes focused on values, discipline and character TURN TO #15

CONTINUED FROM #14 building for children.

Victorian Opposition Leader Jess Wilson acknowledged the Indian community's contribution to Victoria and said Melbourne would not be the same without it. She described Yuwa Diwas as a unique and special event on Victoria's multicultural calendar, celebrating creativity, youth, music and dance.

Cultural performances throughout the evening reflected the theme of freedom and responsibility. The program opened with a Bharatanatyam performance based on the opening shloka of the Rigveda by the Medhasvi Centre for Indian Performing Arts and Culture, featuring Sarvika Halder, Rachna Mukherjee and Marissa Jo Sainu.

This was followed by the screening of the newly launched Vivekananda motivational anthem "Wahi Vivekanand Hai," written and sung by Yogesh Bhatt. Performances by Rhythmica Dance Company, along with skits such as Devi Aradhana and Udaan—Wings of Change, highlighted spirituality, strength and women's empowerment.

Children from the Sishu Mandir program were also felicitated, reinforcing the Society's focus on value-based education. Winners of various competitions were announced during the event.

In the short film competition titled "A World of Freedom," Samraat Ghanghas and Shaurya Ghanghas won first place, with Jeevisha Rawat as runner-up.

In the photography competition, Aradhya Singh won first place, followed by Yash Rastogi.

The painting competition winners were Seerat for World in 2050, Kaira Bagga for My Dream World, and Charvi Bhatt for Unity in Diversity.

The Yuva of the Year 2025 award was presented to Aashini Rastogi.

In another key announcement, organisers confirmed that the Reel Making Competition for Yuwa Diwas 2027 is now open. Participants are encouraged to create Instagram reels using "Wahi Vivekanand Hai," tag the Vivekanand Society of Australia, and creatively express ideas of freedom, responsibility and spirituality.

The evening concluded with a vote of thanks, followed by dinner, leaving the audience with a clear message: while national freedom operates within boundaries, true freedom lies in the upliftment of the mind, spirit and humanity.









L-R: Prof Mohan Yellishetty, Diana Desmier pictured with her family, Himanshi Munshaw Luhar, Kabir Gandhi, Manmeet Singh Bedi // Photos supplied

Between Home & Heart: What 26 Jan means to Indian Australians

OUR REPORTER
@the_indian_sun

A date on the calendar generally tells a single story. But for the Indian diaspora in Australia, 26 January holds two. It is Australia Day here, and India's Republic Day back home—a single date carrying layered meanings of memory, discomfort, gratitude and questions of belonging.

The Indian Sun spoke to five Indian Australians across generations to understand what this day stirs in them, how the idea of "home" and "heart" has shifted over time, and what they want the next generation to understand about identity.

For some, the coincidence of the date itself feels striking. Mohan Yellishetty, Professor of Resources Engineering at Monash University, describes 26 January as "remarkable", not just because it marks two national days, but because it reflects a shared history. "This coincidence speaks to a deeply shared past," he says, pointing to the Commonwealth connection that continues to shape ties between India and Australia today.

That sense of dual belonging is something Yellishetty 〈TURN TO #17〉

> Whilst India will always have a place in my heart, Australia has been my home for the majority of my life. It's almost impossible to imagine living in India againe
>
> **KABIR GANDHI**

CONTINUED FROM #16 carries visibly and proudly. He often wears a logo featuring both national flags and keeps them behind him during public appearances. For him, the phrase "Australia is home, India is heart" is deeply personal. He describes the two countries as his Janma Bhoomi and Karma Bhoomi—the place of his birth and the land where his work and purpose have flourished.

If he had to explain his identity simply, he puts it this way: "I am carrying India in my heart and Australia in my everyday life."

For others, the day brings more complicated emotions. Kabir Gandhi, a Bachelor of Commerce student at the University of Melbourne, voices a feeling familiar to many who have grown up between worlds. "26 January marks both Australia Day and India's Republic Day, but for me it marks more divide than celebration," he says.

He describes a quiet tension—memories of India as "a distant blur", alongside the feeling that he can "never truly be fully accepted as an Australian".

"Whilst India will always have a place in my heart, Australia has been my home for the majority of my life," he reflects, adding that it is "almost impossible to imagine living in India again".

Writer and IT professional Manmeet Singh Bedi sees the same date through a different lens. For him, 26 January feels layered rather than divided. It carries "pride, gratitude, and also reflection", a reminder that identity does not have to be simple.

He sees no conflict in holding two national stories at once. Instead, the day prompts a deeper question: not just where we come from, but "how we belong and how we contribute".

The phrase "Australia is home, India is heart" resonates with Bedi too, though he notes that the balance shifts over time. Earlier in life, India's pull felt stronger. "Over time, as I've built a life, family and work here, Australia has become deeply rooted in my sense of self," he says. Today, the two feel intertwined—"the heart informs how I live at home".

For some, 26 January also brings moments of visible celebration, where the two identities meet with joy. Diana Desmier, a mother of two, recalls her daughters performing the Australian National Anthem at the Australian Open on this date. "It was a powerful reminder of how fortunate we are to live in a multicultural and inclusive Australia."

> I look forward to a future where we can celebrate this country in a way that is meaningful and unifying for everyone who calls it home
>
> **HIMANSHI MUNSHAW LUHAR**

Having moved to Australia at the age of 14, her sense of home has firmly settled here, while India remains the keeper of her "earliest childhood memories".

As part of the Anglo-Indian community, Desmier says navigating identity has long been part of her lived experience. She sees this dual heritage as a strength, telling the next generation: "We embody the best of both worlds."

Himanshi Munshaw Luhar, founder and director of Foodie Trails and an event curator, also speaks with optimism. While 26 January marks celebration for her, it also brings reflection, particularly as she has learned more about Australia's First Nations history. "I look forward to a future where we can celebrate this country in a way that is meaningful and unifying for everyone who calls it home."

Like many migrants, Australia did not feel like home immediately. "It took about two years," Himanshi recalls. Two decades later, that sense of belonging feels settled. India, however, remains the heart—kept alive through family, memories and the taste of childhood food.

If there is one message that runs through all these voices, it is that identity does not need to be neatly divided. For the Indian diaspora, 26 January is less about choosing between two countries, and more about learning how to carry both—in memory, in daily life, and in the stories passed on to the next generation.



Students present their projects at the inaugural Bongosathi Science Exhibition // Photo supplied

Saraswati Puja brings learning and community together in Melbourne

OUR REPORTER
@the_indian_sun

Families, students and community members gathered at the Seabrook Community Centre on Saturday, 24 January for **Bongosathi's first Saraswati Puja in Melbourne**, a celebration that placed learning, culture and togetherness at its centre.

The day opened with traditional Saraswati Puja rituals, including Pushpanjali, Hatekhori for children beginning their writing journey, Aarti and Bisorjon. Devotees came together to seek the blessings of Maa Saraswati, creating a calm and reflective setting that welcomed people across generations. Prasad was shared, followed by a free vegetarian community lunch served to all those present.

A key feature of the gathering was the inaugural Bongosathi Science Exhibition, held under the guidance of Madhurima Saha. The exhibition echoed the spirit of Saraswati Puja by placing curiosity and learning at the forefront. Eleven student groups took part, ranging from primary school students to participants at PhD level. Rather than focusing 〈TURN TO #19〉



Each participating student received an appreciation certificate and a gift, recognising effort and enthusiasm while reinforcing the idea that every contribution has value

CONTINUED FROM #18

on competition, the exhibition encouraged students to explain their ideas with confidence and explore science as a shared journey of discovery.

Each participating student received an appreciation certificate and a gift, recognising effort and enthusiasm while reinforcing the idea that every contribution has value. Parents and community members moved between stalls, engaging directly with the young presenters and their projects.

The event was attended by several Guests of Honour, including Mathew Hilakari MP, Member for Point Cook, Hobsons Bay City Mayor Cr Diana Grima, City of Maribyrnong Councillor Cr Pradeep Tiwari, Dr Narottam Das from CQ University, and actor and filmmaker Mouli Ganguly. The guests spent time with students, visited the exhibition displays and spoke with families, adding to the sense of encouragement that ran through the day.

Dr Rabindranath Shaw, founder of Bongosathi, spoke about the importance of supporting young minds while maintaining cultural traditions and building strong community connections through inclusive initiatives.

The celebration closed with the distribution of certificates, group photographs and a shared feeling of pride among organisers, participants and attendees. For many families, the day offered a chance to reconnect with tradition while giving children space to express curiosity and confidence.

Saraswati Puja 2026 emerged as a community gathering that brought faith and education together in a simple and grounded way, reflecting Bongosathi's ongoing commitment to cultural and educational activities in Melbourne.



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





Cultural showcases, food stalls, children's activities, traditional sports and live music ran across the venue throughout the day. Photos/Facebook

Thousands gather for Thai Pongal celebration at Caribbean Park

OUR REPORTER
@the_indian_sun

More than 4,000 people attended the **Tamil Festival Australia Thai Pongal celebration at Caribbean Park** on Sunday, marking the harvest festival with a full day of cultural activity, food and performances.

The event brought together families and community groups for an indoor program that reflected the themes of gratitude, renewal and shared celebration that sit at the heart of Thai Pongal. Cultural showcases, food stalls, children's activities, 〈TURN TO #21〉



> The spirit of Thai Pongal, gratitude, community, hope and renewal truly shone through as we came together on Sunday. Thank you for sharing your culture



DR CARINA GARLAND

CONTINUED FROM #20 traditional sports and live music ran across the venue throughout the day.

"Always an incredible time at The Tamil Festival Australia Thai Pongal celebration at Caribbean Park. The spirit of Thai Pongal, gratitude, community, hope and renewal truly shone through as we came together on Sunday. Thank you for another great year and for sharing your culture with us," said Dr Carina Garland, Member for Chisholm.

Organisers said the strong turnout highlighted the continuing role of the festival as a meeting point for Melbourne's Tamil community, while also drawing wider participation from across the city. Volunteers, performers, sponsors and stallholders contributed to delivering a program that balanced tradition with a family-friendly atmosphere.



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Parramatta marks Tamil Heritage Month with community celebration

OUR REPORTER
@the_indian_sun

Parramatta's Tamil community has marked Tamil Heritage Month with a local gathering that brought together language, culture and elders, reflecting the steady growth of one of the area's most established migrant communities.

State Member for Parramatta Donna Davis joined members of Australian Tamil Seniors Ltd, who dedicated their regular meeting to the occasion. In a message shared during the event, Davis said January was a time when "Tamil Australians celebrate their beautiful Dravidian* Tamil language, Pongal and their rich Tamil culture".

"It was a pleasure to join the Australian Tamil Seniors Ltd as they dedicated their regular gathering to a celebration of Tamil Heritage Month," she said. "May all Tamil Australians enjoy a happy and prosperous Tamil Heritage Month."

Tamil has become one of the most widely spoken languages other than English in the region. According to the 2021 Census, 5,712 people in the local government area spoke Tamil at home, accounting for 2.2 per cent of the population. That figure rose from 4,859 in 2016, placing Tamil as the sixth most spoken language in the LGA after 〈TURN TO #23〉



State Member for Parramatta Donna Davis joined members of Australian Tamil Seniors Ltd

Within the Parramatta suburb itself, around **1,520 residents spoke Tamil** at home in 2021, representing about five per cent of the suburb's population and making it one of the area's prominent community



<CONTINUED FROM #22>

Mandarin, Cantonese, Korean, Hindi and Arabic.

Within the Parramatta suburb itself, around 1,520 residents spoke Tamil at home in 2021, representing about five per cent of the suburb's population and making it one of the area's prominent community languages.

Tamil speakers in Parramatta come from a range of backgrounds, including Indian Tamil and Sri Lankan Tamil communities, many of whom report broader Indian or Sri Lankan ancestry in census data. Sri Lankan-born residents make up about 1.3 per cent of the LGA, with a large share belonging to the Tamil community.

Tamil Heritage Month, observed each January, centres on the Tamil language, one of the world's oldest living classical languages, alongside festivals such as Pongal, which celebrates harvest, gratitude and renewal. For many families in Parramatta, the month offers a chance to reaffirm cultural identity while remaining firmly rooted in local civic life.





Parramatta honours community champions at 2026 Citizen of the Year Awards

OUR REPORTER
@the_indian_sun

Community service and local leadership took centre stage in Parramatta on the eve of Australia Day, with volunteers from across Western Sydney recognised for their work supporting people in need.

Moses Vedamuthu, founder and president of the Support Organisation for Homeless and Asylum Seekers (SOHAS Charity), was named Parramatta's 2026 Citizen of the Year at a ceremony held at Parramatta Town Hall. His work spans support for homeless people, asylum seekers, international students, migrants and elders across the region.

Mr Vedamuthu said the recognition carried deep personal meaning and reinforced his commitment to community service.

"This is an honour that fills me with a sense of pride and purpose," he said.

"I believe being a good citizen means taking responsibility for the wellbeing of my community and I have learned that my small deeds make big differences to people in need.

"The Citizen of the Year Award is significant to me because it represents the values that guide my involvement and contributions to the community—service, responsibility and a genuine commitment to make a positive difference."

The awards ceremony also recognised Isabelle Marie Nilon as Young Citizen of the Year, Jenni Corsaro as Senior Citizen of the Year, and the Westmead Private Hospital Volunteers as Community Group of the Year.

Ms Nilon, a volunteer with North Rocks Carlingford Little Athletics, said the award was an opportunity to encourage young people, especially girls, to see volunteering and leadership as achievable and worthwhile.

"This award sets an example for the North Rocks Carlingford Little Athletics girls group I coach and mentor," she said.

"This recognition should inspire older athletes in my club to consider volunteering, coaching and Committee roles, as I have done and to pass on their knowledge and experience to make a meaningful contribution to the next generation of Little Athletes."

Senior Citizen of the Year recipient Jenni Corsaro said her work with older residents in Parramatta was driven by simple human connection.

"I love seeing senior citizens blossom and make new friends while having a good time," she said.

"I do this for me, as much as I do this for them, because I too am a senior and it keeps a smile on my face."

"This award means so much to me because it confirms I am doing something positive 〈TURN TO #25〉

> The Citizen of the Year Award is significant to me because it represents the values that guide my involvement and contributions to the community

GUY BARNETT



CONTINUED FROM #24 to improve the lives of local senior citizens, if only in a small way."

The Westmead Private Hospital Volunteers, named Community Group of the Year, said the recognition reflected the dedication of volunteers who support patients, families and hospital staff each week.

"This reflects the countless hours our volunteers give each week to support patients, families and hospital staff, often during difficult and emotional times," the group said.

City of Parramatta Lord Mayor Cr Martin Zaiter said the awards highlighted the everyday acts of service that strengthen the local community.

"The Citizen of the Year Awards recognise people who consistently dedicate their time, energy and compassion to make Parramatta a better place," he said.

"This year's recipients show that leadership comes in many forms and that small acts of service can have a powerful impact on our community.

"Congratulations to all the winners. Thank you for inspiring us all and strengthening our community. You make us proud."

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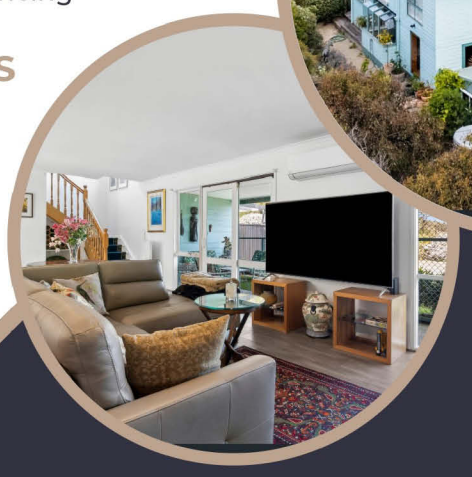
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Melbourne KMCC brings community together through high-energy T10 cricket tournament

OUR REPORTER
@the_indian_sun

Melbourne KMCC delivered a tightly run and well-attended **T10 Cricket Tournament**, drawing strong participation from across the local cricket community and reinforcing the role of sport as a shared social anchor. With 15 teams competing across multiple grounds, the event combined competitive cricket with a broader community atmosphere built around food, music and conversation.

Western Tigers Cricket Club continued its strong form, securing the championship title for the second year in a row after a consistent run throughout the tournament. Wyndham Tuskers finished as runners-up, pushing the eventual winners with spirited performances that kept matches engaging for players and spectators alike. The short T10 format brought urgency to every over, rewarding sharp fielding, quick decision-making and teamwork.

The tournament was formally inaugurated by Members of Parliament Steve McGhie and Evan Mulholland, alongside Giulio Venditti, President of Sunshine Heights Cricket Club. Their presence reflected the growing recognition of community-led sporting initiatives and the role they play in connecting diverse groups through shared experiences. Organisers noted that the opening ceremony set a positive tone for the day, with players and volunteers alike responding to the sense of occasion.

Members of Parliament Steve McGhie and Evan Mulholland, alongside Giulio Venditti, President of Sunshine Heights Cricket Club, attend the Melbourne KMCC T10 Cricket Tournament ceremony as organisers present the championship and runners-up trophies.

Member of Parliament Evan Mulholland addresses players and guests during the Melbourne KMCC T10 Cricket Tournament opening ceremony, alongside fellow dignitaries on stage.

Member of Parliament Steve McGhie presents an individual award to a player during the Melbourne KMCC T10 Cricket Tournament presentation ceremony.

Member of Parliament Steve McGhie addresses players and guests during the opening of the Melbourne KMCC T10 Cricket Tournament, with fellow dignitaries present at the ceremony.

Western Tigers Cricket Club lift the winners' trophy after clinching the Melbourne ‹TURN TO #27›

KMCC Chairman Shiyas Khalid thanked all 15 participating teams for their commitment, as well as the tournament sponsors



Representational Photo by Sanket Gupta Sharma on Unsplash







CONTINUED FROM #26 KMCC T10 Cricket Tournament title for the second consecutive year.

Trophies and individual awards displayed ahead of the Melbourne KMCC T10 Cricket Tournament presentation ceremony, marking the champions and runners-up of the 2026 edition.

KMCC Chairman Shiyas Khalid thanked all 15 participating teams for their commitment and sportsmanship, as well as the tournament sponsors, FLYWORLD Group, for their backing. He also acknowledged Brimbank Strikers Cricket Club for providing access to five cricket grounds, a logistical contribution that proved central to keeping the tournament on schedule. Khalid said the aim was to create a space where competition could sit comfortably alongside social interaction, allowing families and supporters to feel part of the day rather than observers on the sidelines.

A notable highlight was the participation of Indian cricketer and IPL player Basil Thampi, who represented Western Tigers during the tournament. His involvement attracted attention from younger players, many of whom saw it as a rare opportunity to share the field with a professional athlete. Khalid described Thampi's presence as a genuine morale boost for aspiring cricketers, adding that such moments can leave a lasting impression beyond the scoreboard.

The trophy presentation was led by Karthik Arasu, President of the Australia India Sports Council, joined by Prince Abraham, CEO of Flyworld Group, and Jose. The ceremony reflected the collaborative nature of the event, bringing together sporting administrators, sponsors and organisers to close the day on a celebratory note.

Behind the scenes, much of the success rested on the efforts of KMCC's volunteer team. Members including Hilal, Ajees, Haris, Illyas, Faseeh, Manu, Rishal, Riyas, Saleem, Shabeeb, Shameer, Swafdil, Asif and Gadhafi coordinated match operations, ground logistics and food service through the KMCC kitchen. Their coordination ensured that matches ran smoothly and that players and visitors were well looked after throughout the day.

Feedback from teams and supporters has been encouraging, with many pointing to the balance between organisation and atmosphere as a defining strength. Organisers say this response has already sparked discussions about expanding the tournament next year, both in scale and in the range of activities offered alongside the cricket.

For KMCC, the tournament served as a reminder that community sport thrives when planning, partnerships and volunteer effort align. While the trophies marked individual achievement, the broader takeaway was the sense of connection built across clubs, families and supporters, setting a solid foundation for future editions of the event.



Nishma Handa and Vic Rajah at a bestchance early learning site in Melbourne's outer suburbs, reflecting the organisation's focus on inclusive leadership and community connection. Photo/supplied

Diverse leadership shaping inclusive early years support across Melbourne

OUR REPORTER
@the_indian_sun

Bestchance is placing a strong focus on inclusive leadership as it works to support children and families across Melbourne's outer suburbs, drawing on the lived experience and professional expertise of its senior team to reflect the communities it serves.

More than 45 per cent of children enrolled in bestchance Early Years services come from households where English is not the primary language spoken. Punjabi is the most common language among these families, making cultural safety and inclusion central considerations in how services are designed and delivered.

Since taking on the role of Board Chair in November 2022, Vic Rajah has been a key advocate for embedding culturally informed perspectives at governance level. He says diversity within leadership helps ensure decisions remain grounded in the real experiences of families using the services.

He points to a Board that brings together professional skills alongside personal cultural insight, allowing strategies and planning to reflect a broad range of needs. For families accessing early years support, that approach aims to create environments where they feel welcomed, understood and supported.

Alongside this governance focus, General Manager of People and Culture Nishma Handa oversees workforce development with a strong emphasis on inclusion. With more than two decades of experience spanning healthcare, education, aged care, community services and early years, she works closely with teams to build workplaces where staff feel valued and heard.

Across bestchance, the workforce represents at least 27 different cultures. Ms Handa says this diversity strengthens the organisation's ability to understand community needs and respond in ways that are both practical and respectful of cultural differences.

The impact of this approach is visible on the ground. Kritika Sharma, an educator at Bembit Bag-rook Kindergarten in Tarneit, says diverse leadership and staffing directly influence daily practice in early learning settings. She describes an environment where different cultures, languages and family backgrounds are actively acknowledged, helping children feel respected and included from an early age.

Ms Sharma adds that educators are encouraged to share their own identities and learn from colleagues, creating a workplace culture that supports professional growth while fostering a sense of belonging for children and families alike.

For Mr Rajah, representation within leadership remains a core principle. He believes when families see themselves reflected in the organisations supporting their children, trust is easier to build and services are better placed to deliver positive outcomes.

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Raj Aggarwal with his Spirit of Logan Award at the City of Logan Australia Day Awards 2026, recognised for his long-standing volunteer service and community leadership across the city. Photo/Facebook

Spirit of Logan award honours community stalwart Raj Aggarwal

OUR REPORTER
@the_indian_sun

Logan's Australia Day Awards shone a light on grassroots service this year, with Raj Aggarwal named the recipient of the Spirit of Logan Award for his long-standing commitment to the city.

The award recognises individuals whose efforts strengthen community ties and contribute to the wellbeing and safety of the region. Aggarwal's work spans volunteer service, local events, emergency response, and neighbourhood support, reflecting a hands-on approach to civic life.

A familiar figure across Logan, Aggarwal has played a central role in coordinating community events such as Christmas Carols and in the ongoing management of the Mundoolun Community Centre. His involvement extends beyond event organisation, with active service as a rural firefighter and a member of the State Emergency Service, roles that place him on the frontline during times of need.

> The Spirit of Logan Award sits among the city's highest civic honours, celebrating service that is sustained rather than symbolic. In recognising Aggarwal, the awards underscored the importance of volunteers whose impact is often quiet but enduring

The City of Logan highlighted Aggarwal's ability to bring people together through connection programs and safety initiatives, noting the consistency of his contribution over many years. His work has supported residents across different age groups and backgrounds, helping build trust and a shared sense of responsibility within the community.

The Spirit of Logan Award sits among the city's highest civic honours, celebrating service that is sustained rather than symbolic. In recognising Aggarwal, the awards underscored the importance of volunteers whose impact is often quiet but enduring.

As Logan marked Australia Day by acknowledging local contribution, Aggarwal's recognition reflected the role community leadership continues to play in shaping everyday life across the city.

Public invited to shape Western Australia's first Multicultural Act

OUR REPORTER
@the_indian_sun


Photo via Office of Multicultural Interests, WA

Western Australians are being invited to help shape a **proposed Multicultural Act**, with public consultation closing on Sunday 15 February 2026. The process follows the release of a discussion paper that sets out how multicultural principles could be written into law for the first time in the state.

Based on the 2021 Census, more than 32 per cent of Western Australians were born overseas, with residents speaking over 249 languages and following more than 130 religions. The paper argues that this level of diversity warrants formal recognition through legislation that would guide how government policies, services and decisions are designed and delivered.

The proposal comes as Western Australia approaches its bicentenary in 2029, a moment framed as an opportunity to reflect on how successive waves of migration have shaped the state's social, cultural and economic life. A Multicultural Act, the paper suggests, could provide a consistent framework to support inclusion, fairness and participation across public institutions.

While Western Australia already has a Charter of Multiculturalism, an advisory council and a policy framework in place, these measures are not backed by legislation. The research underpinning the consultation notes that this leaves them vulnerable to shifts in government priorities, unlike legislated models in other states that provide continuity and parliamentary oversight.

Every large mainland state except Western Australia now has multicultural legislation in place. Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia all operate under Acts that set clear expectations for government agencies, require reporting, and embed advisory structures. The research finds that these laws have moved multicultural commitments from aspiration into obligation, strengthening accountability and transparency across government.

The scale of existing policy effort in Western Australia is already substantial. As of September 2025, 64 public sector agencies are implementing multicultural plans under the current framework. Together, they have committed to 4,830 specific actions across service delivery, participation and inclusion, with nearly half completed to date. The proposed Act would formalise this work rather than replace it.

The discussion paper also places strong emphasis on the distinct position of Aboriginal peoples as the First Peoples of Western Australia. It acknowledges that First Nations communities and people from migrant and refugee backgrounds have different histories and starting points, and that any legislative framework must recognise this difference while supporting equity across the broader population.

A key question for consultation is whether Western Australia's existing multicultural advisory arrangements should be written into law. Research from other jurisdictions shows that legislated advisory bodies strengthen trust between government and culturally diverse communities, ensuring consultation is structured, ongoing and tied to decision-making rather than dependent on goodwill.

The potential role of local government is also raised. In states such as Victoria and New South Wales, multicultural legislation has drawn councils into formal reporting and planning processes, improving visibility of regional and rural needs and reducing a purely metropolitan focus. The research suggests similar outcomes could follow in Western Australia.

Beyond governance, the research links multicultural legislation with stronger responses to racism and social tension. Jurisdictions with Acts in place report clearer coordination between agencies during periods of community stress, supported by defined responsibilities and reporting pathways.

Public feedback on the proposed Act can be provided through an online survey or by written submission. Support is available for participants who require interpretation or translated materials. A summary of submissions is expected to be released in April 2026, followed by development of a regulatory proposal later in the year.



She came to Australia as a dependent. She built a dance school

INDIRA LAISRAM
@indira_laisram

On a weeknight in Melbourne's west, while most people are winding down after work, **Lalitha Narayanan** is just getting started.

She has already finished her day job in accounting and operations. Now she is at a community hall in Point Cook, tying ankle bells, checking the music, and calling her students into position. For the next two hours, six days a week, she teaches Bharatanatyam, the classical Indian dance form she first stepped into as a five-year-old child.

"It's a way of life," Lalitha says. "I approach everything from problems to decisions through what dance has taught me."



That sentence sums up her story. It is a story of discipline and devotion, but also of survival, reinvention and quiet courage. It is about carrying an ancient art form across oceans, and building something lasting in a new country.

Lalitha is Tamil, but she grew up in Kochi, Kerala. She speaks Malayalam easily, and talks about Kerala with the familiarity of someone who belongs to the place.

"Yes, I was born and brought up in Kochi," she says. "I graduated in Kochi. For my post-graduation, I moved to Tamil Nadu."

Her introduction to Bharatanatyam came early—and in a way that still makes her laugh.

"My elder sister used to learn dance. I would go with my mother to drop her off. That's how I ended up in class."

The first teacher she met left a strong impression. "She was very strict," Lalitha recalls. "She used to use the talam (wooden rhythm stick) and would throw it when someone made a mistake."

As a child, Lalitha was terrified. She told her mother she would never learn dance, especially not with that teacher.

"And that's exactly the opposite that happened," she says. "I learnt with her for about 15 years."

She did her arangetram at around 14, and by her late teens she was already being asked to teach younger students—a turning point that shaped the rest of her life.

> "Teaching came to me through my first guru. When I was 16 or 17, she asked me to teach younger students. That's when I realised I loved teaching
>
> **LALITHA NARAYANAN**

"Teaching came to me through my first guru," she says. "When I was 16 or 17, she asked me to teach younger students. That's when I realised I loved teaching."

Lalitha's training is rooted in the Kalakshetra tradition, a school of Bharatanatyam known for its structure, clarity and strong lines. In Kerala, she trained with Kalakshetra Vilasini at Nrithyasri, an academy for classical dance. She spent more than a decade there, performing in major productions and accompanying her guru across different cities in India.

Later, she continued her learning under the late Padma Shri Adyar K. Lakshman and his daughter, Induvadana Malli. Their guidance, Lalitha says, helped her grow as a versatile performer with a strong stage presence.

"The Kalakshetra style is more structured and disciplined," she explains. "Kalakshetra is derived from the Pandanallur style, which was later structured by Rukmini Devi Arundale."

That training shaped not just her dance, but also her temperament.

"Dance taught me calmness and composure," she says. "Once the curtain goes up, you smile."

It taught her patience, presence of mind, and teamwork—the kind of discipline that stays with you long after you leave the stage.

A new chapter in Australia

Lalitha moved to Australia in 2013 through her then husband's job. "I moved here as a dependent. That's how the Australia chapter began."

New country, new suburb, new routines—and still, the same art form calling her back. **<TURN TO #35>**



> I describe Bharatanatyam as Indian ballet, but with more storytelling and emotion
>
> **LALITHA NARAYANAN**







❮CONTINUED FROM #33❯

She began with performances, the way many classical dancers do.

"Temples were my first platform, especially ISKCON," she says. "That's how I began in 2013."

Soon people started asking if she taught. In the beginning, it was only three or four students. She did not have a studio. She taught wherever she could at community centres, rented spaces, halls.

Over time, those small beginnings grew into Nrithyopasana School of Bharatanatyam, based in Victoria. The school has expanded into Melbourne's west and south-east, and now has around 55 students—a number that still surprises her.

"What makes me happy is that students who started with me 10 years ago are still learning."

Lalitha has performed in traditional spaces, but she has also taken Bharatanatyam to places where people do not expect to see it.

One early highlight was a multicultural anti-racism program at Melbourne train stations around 2014–15, where different stations featured different cultural performances.

"I performed Bharatanatyam," she says. "And I even improvised to African beats on the spot."

It is the kind of moment that captures what she does so well: staying rooted in classical technique, while still being open and brave in the moment.

When she performs, people often stop her afterwards—not just Indians, but Australians from every background.

"They were very curious," she says. "They asked about the bells, the costume, the music, the meaning."

That curiosity has turned into connection. Today, Lalitha teaches students from Sri Lanka and Fiji too, and her school is regularly invited to multicultural and community events across Melbourne.

In 2023, she had a rare opportunity: a collaboration with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. She did not dance that day—she played nattuvangam, the rhythmic accompaniment used in classical dance, for another performer.

Every year, Nrithyopasana holds an annual concert—a showcase of students and their progress.

"This year it's on 28 February," Lalitha says.

It is not a ticketed event. It is not about profit. "It's purely passion-driven," she says.

Bharatanatyam is not just an activity in her calendar. It is what keeps her steady.

"Dance helped my mental health and kept me grounded," she says. "Teaching and interacting with students lifts me whenever I feel low."

A single mother, a steady stage

In the middle of building a school and working full-time, Lalitha went through a difficult personal chapter. She is now a single parent to her eight-year-old son. She separated when he was four, and later divorced in 2024.

"It was a very difficult phase," she says, and adds that domestic violence was involved. She does not want to go into details. But she is clear about one thing: "Dance gave me strength."

Melbourne has many Bharatanatyam schools—Lalitha estimates more than 40. There is competition, she says, but there is also collaboration.

So what makes Nrithyopasana stand out?

"I balance discipline with openness. My students say they can talk to me—that matters to me."

For her, the goal is not just performance. It is confidence. It is character. It is community.

When asked how she explains Bharatanatyam to an Australian audience, Lalitha uses a simple comparison.

"I describe it as Indian ballet," she says, "but with more storytelling and emotion. Bharatanatyam has abhinaya or expression and a strong theatrical element. It is not only technique. It is also feeling, narrative, and presence."

And she believes the art form is changing in a healthy way.

"It used to be only about deities," she says. "Now there is innovation. It doesn't have to stick to a certain deity or religion."

Art, she believes, should be able to speak beyond language and boundaries.

"It shouldn't have a language," she says. "It should be storytelling."

In multicultural Melbourne, that idea lands well. "Absolutely," she says, when asked if Bharatanatyam fits beautifully into the city's cultural landscape.

Lalitha's Her week is full: work, parenting, classes, rehearsals, planning an annual concert, mentoring older students, guiding beginners, attending workshops to keep learning herself.

But passion is what fuels her to keep showing up, even when life is heavy.

Because once the curtain goes up, you smile.

And you dance.

Malaysia Airlines boosts Trivandrum focus as A330neo replaces Sydney–Melbourne routes



Photos supplied

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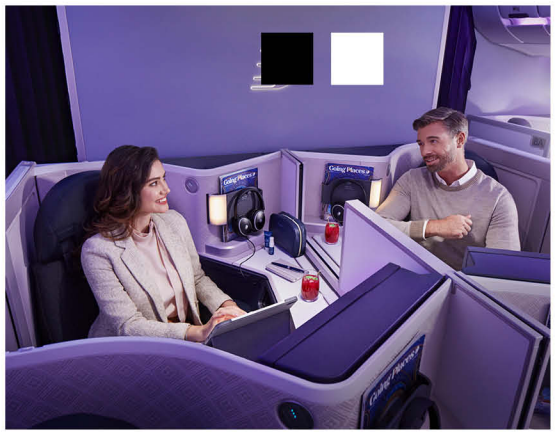
Malaysia Airlines is sharpening its focus on southern India as it rolls out the next phase of its Australia network strategy, pairing destination promotion with a stronger emphasis on its newest aircraft across key routes.

All flights from Sydney and Melbourne to Kuala Lumpur are now operated by the airline's A330neo, with three daily services from each city. The shift places the carrier's youngest widebody aircraft at the centre of its Australia operations, as it continues to promote Trivandrum as a gateway to Kerala for Australian travellers.

The A330neo has been positioned as a core part of the airline's renewed onboard offering, blending updated cabin design with a distinctly Malaysian interior aesthetic. Songket-inspired motifs feature across cabin ceilings, seats and decorative panels, while ambient hand-rail lighting is designed to create a softer, more premium atmosphere throughout the flight.

Connectivity and in-flight entertainment are central to the aircraft's appeal. Complimentary Wi-Fi with unlimited data is available to all passengers, supporting uninterrupted use across the journey. Business Class features 17.3-inch 4K screens with Bluetooth pairing, built-in wireless charging and multiple power outlets, while Economy Class offers 13.3-inch 4K screens, among the largest in the market. Family-friendly features include a dedicated kids mode and parental controls.

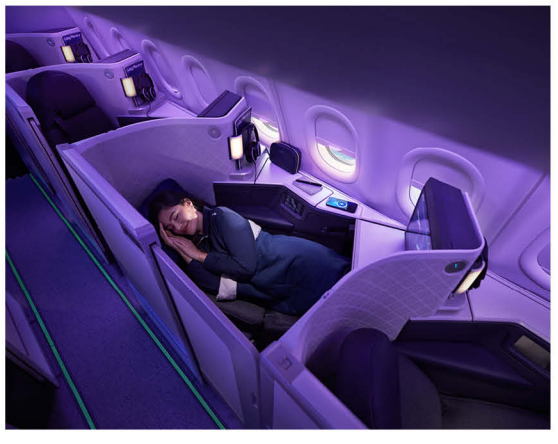
The aircraft also introduces changes to the dining experience. A self-service area in the Business Class cabin allows passengers to access premium snacks and beverages at any time, alongside 〈TURN TO #37〉

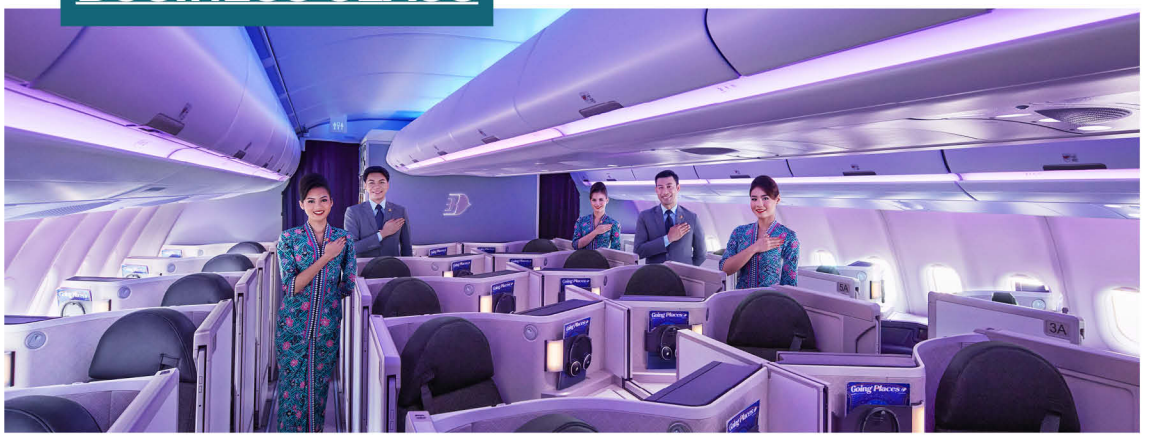






BUSINESS CLASS

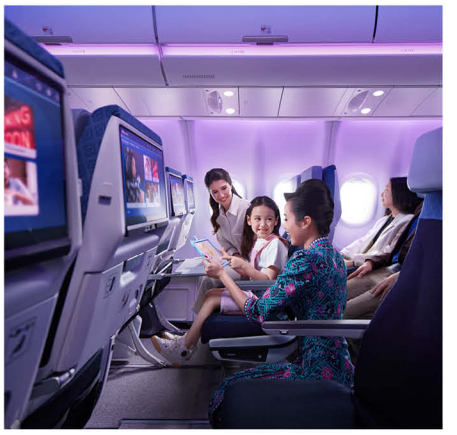




ECONOMY CLASS







《CONTINUED FROM #36》 on-demand meal service on selected sectors. The design reflects a broader push by Malaysia Airlines to balance flexibility with comfort on long-haul routes.

In Business Class, the A330neo is fitted with 28 Collins Aerospace Elevation seats, each converting into a fully flat bed and offering direct aisle access and privacy doors. The suspension and cushioning system is designed to support smoother transitions from seating to rest, while design details continue the airline's focus on cultural cues integrated into a modern cabin environment.

Economy Class comprises 269 Recaro R3 seats, ergonomically designed with practical features such as coat hooks, cup holders and generous storage. Twenty-four seats offer extra legroom, catering to passengers seeking additional space on longer journeys.

Beyond passenger comfort, the A330neo forms part of the airline's efficiency programme. The aircraft delivers up to a 25 per cent reduction in fuel consumption and emissions compared with previous generation models, supported by lightweight seat construction and Rolls-Royce Trent 7000 engines.

The focus on Trivandrum is backed by tactical fares across Australian capitals. Sale fares run from 10 to 23 February 2026, with travel available through to 30 November 2026. Return economy fares start from AUD 739 from Perth, AUD 829 from Adelaide, AUD 889 from Brisbane, and AUD 839 from both Sydney and Melbourne. Business Class return fares begin at AUD 3,579 from Perth, rising to just over AUD 4,000 from east coast cities.

The focus on Trivandrum is backed by tactical fares across Australian capitals. Sale fares run from 10 to 23 February 2026, with travel available through to 30 November 2026

By aligning fleet renewal with targeted destination promotion, the airline is positioning Kerala alongside its wider Asia network while reinforcing Kuala Lumpur's role as a central hub for Australian travellers heading into the region.





Photos supplied

Helping First-Home Buyers Get Ahead

Get $500 a week while you build with Simonds Homes*

Owning your first home just got easier and more exciting.

OUR REPORTER
@the_indian_sun

Buying your first home is a major life milestone, and **Simonds Homes** has introduced a game-changing new offer to help first-home buyers stay financially comfortable while their dream home is being built.

For a limited time, eligible customers in Victoria, Southeast Queensland and South Australia can receive $500 a week for 16 weeks when they choose to build a home from Simonds Emerge range.

This extra support gives first-time builders breathing room to manage rent, bills, furnishings, or other essentials, so you can focus on the excitement of moving into your new home rather than the stress of daily expenses.

HOW SIMONDS' GAME-CHANGING OFFER WORKS

Once you've selected your Emerge home, paid your deposit and signed your contract, Simonds takes care of the build process. When construction moves on site and reaches base stage, the weekly $500 payments begin for 16 weeks while your new home is being constructed. These payments can be used however you choose, from covering living expenses to furnishing and landscaping.

It's real cash in your bank account when you need it most, offsetting rent and bills to make your journey to new home ownership smoother.

DISCOVER SIMONDS' EMERGE RANGE

The Emerge collection is designed to deliver affordable, cleverly designed homes with smart layouts and stylish design, starting from $226,600*, making it highly appealing for first-home buyers and investors alike. Three of Simonds' most popular Emerge designs are the Mundi 22 in Victoria, Bremer 〈TURN TO #39〉





Detailed designs, floorplan options and pricing information are all available online, and when you're ready Simonds New Home Specialists can guide you through every step of the process

<CONTINUED FROM #38> 19 in Southeast Queensland and the Miller 24 in South Australia.

1 Available in Victoria: Mundi 22—Stylish, Spacious Single-Storey Living

The Mundi 22 is a beautifully balanced single-storey home designed for growing families and those seeking extra space without complexity. This 4-bedroom, 2-bathroom design with a 2-car garage sits comfortably on a 12.5 m+ block and delivers a thoughtful layout that connects generous living zones with everyday functionality.

At its heart is a well-appointed kitchen with a walk-in pantry that flows into an open plan living and dining area, seamlessly extending to a covered alfresco, ideal for relaxed indoor-outdoor living and entertaining. A separate media room and spacious bedrooms offer flexible retreats for family life, while the elegant master suite with its modern ensuite and walk-in robe creates a private haven for homeowners.

The Mundi 22 blends style and practicality, making it a compelling choice for buyers aiming to upsize with comfort and contemporary design.

2 Available in Queensland: Bremer 19—Effortless Family Living

The Bremer 19 is a single-storey home designed for families who want smart, functional living without compromising on style. Featuring 4 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, and a 2-car garage, this home fits comfortably on a 10 m+ block, offering a layout that's both practical and welcoming.

At the heart of the home, the open-plan kitchen, dining, and family area flows effortlessly to a covered alfresco, perfect for everyday living and entertaining. The master suite provides a private retreat with its ensuite, while three additional bedrooms are thoughtfully positioned to give everyone space and comfort.

With clever design, contemporary finishes, and versatile living zones, the Bremer 19 makes family life easy, stylish, and enjoyable, ideal for Queensland buyers seeking a modern, well-planned home.

3 Available in South Australia: Miller 24—Contemporary Family Living

The Miller 24 is a thoughtfully designed single-storey home that perfectly balances modern style with practical family living. Boasting 4 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, and a 2-car garage, this home fits comfortably on a 12.5 m+ block and caters to growing families or those seeking versatile, spacious layouts.

At the heart of the home is a stylish kitchen with a walk-in pantry that flows into the open plan living and dining area, creating a seamless connection to the covered alfresco, ideal for casual entertaining or relaxed indoor-outdoor living. A separate media room provides a dedicated retreat for movie nights or quiet downtime, while generously sized bedrooms ensure comfort and flexibility for all family members. The master suite stands out with a modern ensuite and walk-in robe, offering a private sanctuary for homeowners.

With its clever layout, contemporary features, and family-focused design, the Miller 24 is a standout choice for those looking to upsize without compromising on style or functionality.

WHY EMERGE APPEALS TO FIRST-TIME BUYERS

The Emerge collection balances affordability, modern design and thoughtful layouts, making it a practical entry point into home ownership. Whether you're drawn to the efficient footprint of the Mundi 22, the family-ready flow of the Bremer 19, or the spacious lifestyle offered by the Miller 24, there's an option to suit different needs and budgets, all under the Emerge umbrella.

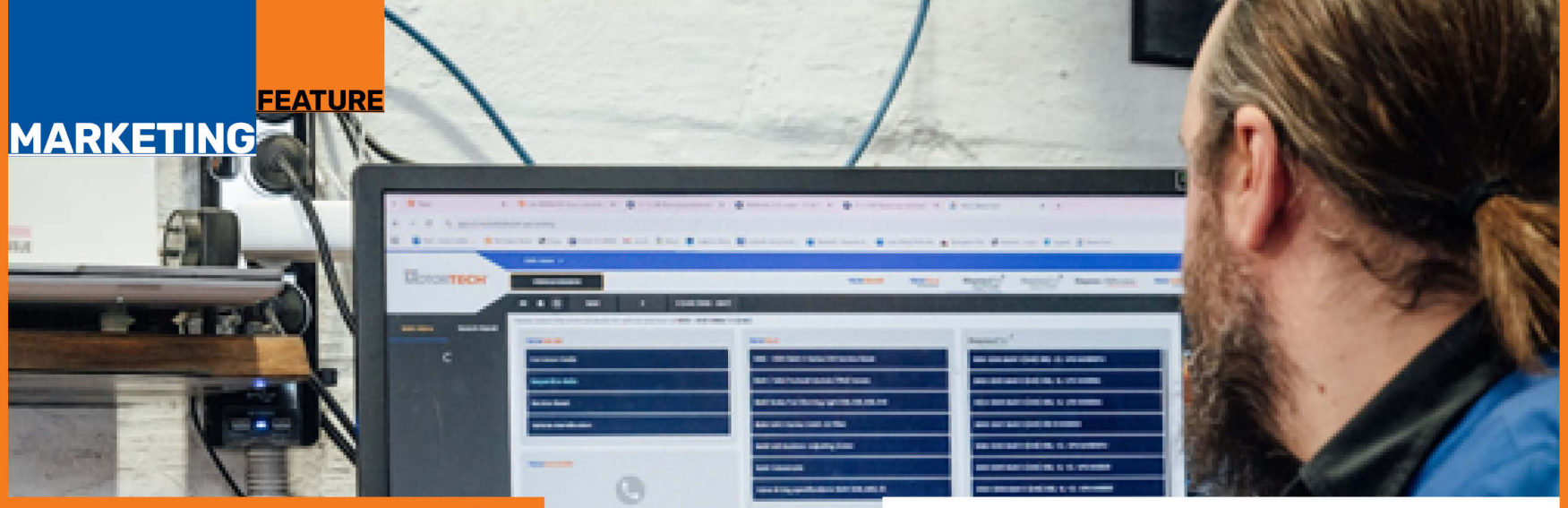
Backed by over 75 years of experience, Simonds Homes doesn't just build houses, it delivers peace of mind. With $500 a week while your home is under construction, your first step into home ownership is both rewarding and empowering.

LEARN MORE

Learn more about Simonds' game-changing offer and explore the full Emerge range online, visit **simonds.com.au**. Detailed designs, floorplan options and pricing information are all available online, and when you're ready Simonds New Home Specialists can guide you through every step of the process.

**Offer available on Simonds Emerge homes only. $500 per week for up to 16 weeks. Terms and conditions apply.*

*Visit **simonds.com.au** for full details.*



Modern workshops need fast, trusted technical support to keep up with increasingly complex vehicle technology

Why Every Modern Workshop Needs MotorTech in Its Corner

OUR REPORTER
@the_indian_sun

Running an automotive workshop today is more complex than ever. Vehicles are packed with advanced electronics, evolving safety systems, and manufacturer-specific procedures that leave little room for guesswork. For busy workshops, the challenge isn't just fixing vehicles, it's finding the right information, fast, and having confidence that the solution is correct.

That's where a **MotorTech subscription** comes in. MotorTech is designed to be a practical, everyday resource for workshops—combining trusted technical information, expert support, and real-world problem solving in one subscription.

At its core is access to a comprehensive online technical database, covering a wide range of vehicles and systems. Instead of juggling multiple sources, outdated manuals, or unreliable online forums, MotorTech gives workshops a single, reliable place to find service procedures, specifications, wiring diagrams, diagnostics guidance, and repair information. When time on the hoist matters, having accurate information at your fingertips can be the difference between a smooth job and costly delays.

But MotorTech goes beyond just data. One of its most valued features is Techline—direct phone access to qualified automotive technicians based in Melbourne. These are experienced professionals who understand the realities of workshop life and can help you work through complex challenges and guide you to the right information when you're stuck. Rather than spending hours chasing answers, workshops can speak to someone who knows the trade and can point them in the right direction quickly and confidently.

A MotorTech subscription also includes Tech Talk, a monthly print magazine that has been supporting workshops for four decades. Tech Talk focuses on real workshop issues—common faults, emerging technologies, and practical repair insights—written by technicians, for technicians. It's a valuable resource that many workshops keep on hand for reference, training apprentices, or simply staying up to date with what's happening across the industry.

Importantly, everything behind MotorTech is backed by the Victorian Automotive Chamber of Commerce, an organisation with more than 100 years of experience backing the auto industry. That depth of knowledge and experience means MotorTech isn't theoretical or generic—it's built around the real needs of Australian workshops and the challenges they face every day.

In an industry where technology is advancing rapidly and margins are tight, having trusted technical support isn't a luxury—it's a business necessity. MotorTech helps workshops reduce downtime, improve repair accuracy, support their technicians, and deliver better outcomes for customers.

If you're looking for a smarter, more reliable way to support your workshop, MotorTech is worth exploring. Find out more at motortech.com.au or call 1300 130 116.

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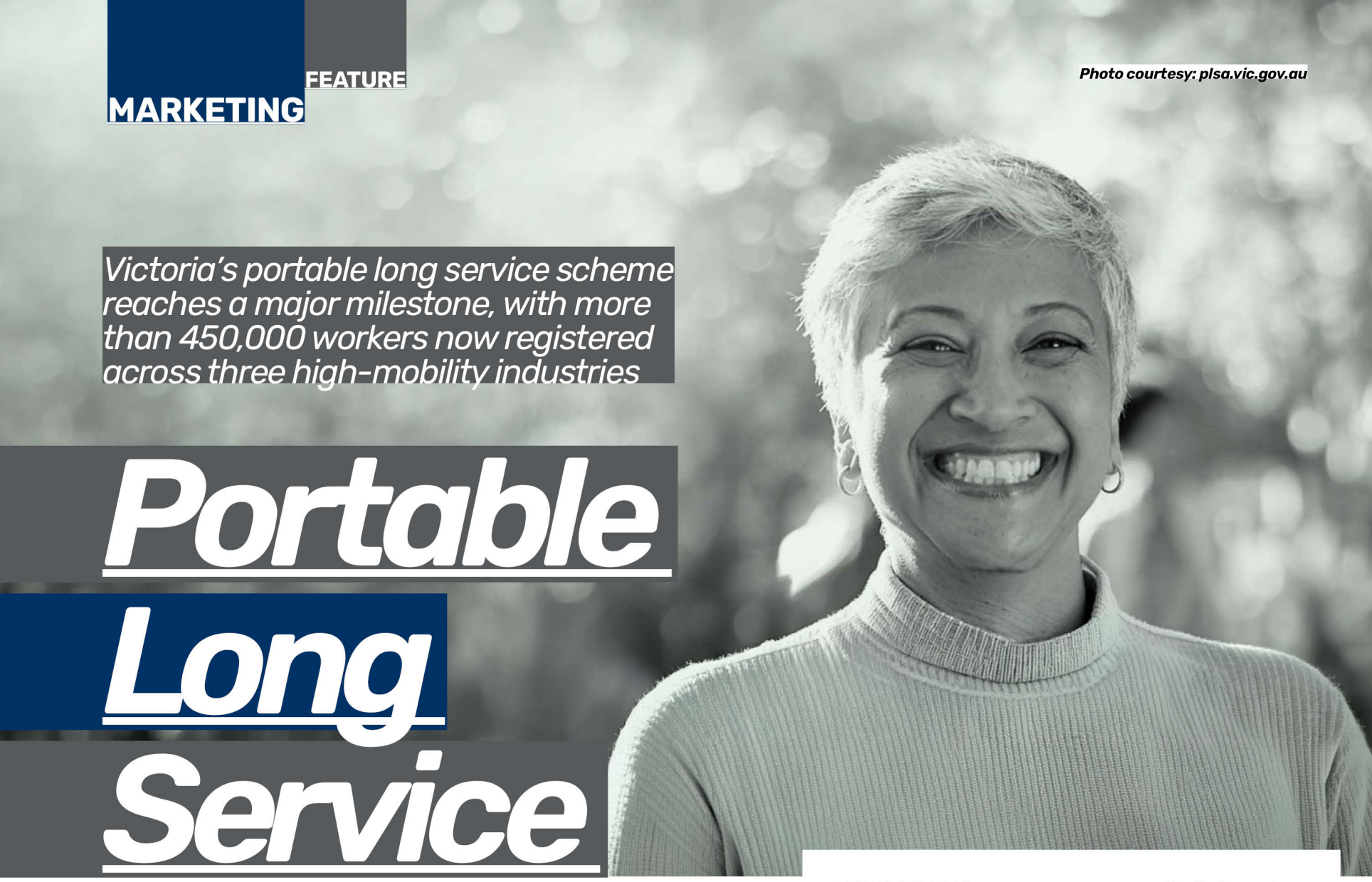


Photo courtesy: plsa.vic.gov.au

Victoria's portable long service scheme reaches a major milestone, with more than 450,000 workers now registered across three high-mobility industries

Portable Long Service Leave Scheme reaches 450,000 Victorian workers

OUR REPORTER
@the_indian_sun

More than 450,000 workers across Victoria's community services, contract cleaning and security industries are now registered under the state's Portable Long Service Benefits Scheme, a milestone that highlights the scale of the workforce covered by the program.

The scheme allows eligible workers to build long service leave entitlements even if they change jobs or move between employers, provided they remain within the same industry and work for an employer registered with the Portable Long Service Authority. It applies to full-time, part-time, casual and fixed-term employees.

In most Australian workplaces, long service leave accrues only after an extended period with the same employer. The Victorian scheme, which began in 2019, was designed to reflect the reality of industries where work is often fragmented and employees may have multiple employers over time. By making entitlements portable, the system aims to ensure continuity for workers whose careers do not follow a single-employer path.

Under the arrangement, employers are required to record hours worked and wages paid, and submit this information to the Portable Long Service Authority. The Authority then tracks each worker's accrued entitlement across their employment history in the relevant industry.

Once a worker has completed at least seven years of service under the scheme, they can apply to access their portable long service benefits. Employers are legally required to register eligible workers, and both workers and employers are encouraged to check their status through the Authority's website.

The scheme currently covers three sectors that employ hundreds of thousands of Victorians and are characterised by high labour mobility. Its continued expansion points to a growing recognition of non-traditional employment patterns and the need for protections that move with workers rather than staying tied to a single job.

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Fix the care you have

You have rights and choices. Our free, confidential support helps you stand up for them, and make your voice heard.



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Call 1 800 700 600

We help you stand up for your aged care rights

OPAN member organisations by state or territory

opan.org.au

ADACAS Advocacy · Advocacy Tasmania in your corner · ERA Elder Rights Australia Promoting the human rights of all older people · Seniors Rights Service · Darwin Community Legal Service · ADAAustralia Your Aged and Disability Advocates · aras Aged Rights Advocacy Service · Advocare Empowering older people in WA · CatholicCare NT

OPAN is funded by the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing through the National Aged Care Advocacy Program (NACAP).

Australia forgot this Indian history. One man found It.

Tracing his family to 1885, ***Manmeet Singh Bedi*** *uncovers Australia's forgotten Indian history, reshaping identity, belonging, and the nation's migrant story through a children's book*

INDIRA LAISRAM
@indira_laisram

Manmeet Singh Bedi didn't expect a family curiosity to turn into a discovery that would rewrite his sense of belonging and challenge what many Australians assume about Indian migration.

The turning point came when he traced his line further back than family lore. "My great-great-grandfather came here in 1885," he says. Like many, he grew up believing the common narrative: that significant Indian migration to Australia only began in the 1970s, after the White Australia policy ended.

"I knew my grandfather, Teja Singh Grewal, came in 1947. He was a pioneer who helped build the first Sikh temple in Woolgoolga," says Bedi. "But they'd always told me, 'We've been here for a very long time.' I just thought it was made up. I was going, 'No Indians have been here that long.'"

Yet there was an early twist in his own story. "Funny enough, I was born in Norway," he says. "We migrated back. So technically, I'm first generation, even though I'm fifth." That contradiction—first and fifth at once—captures the **❮TURN TO #45❯**



❮CONTINUED FROM #44❯

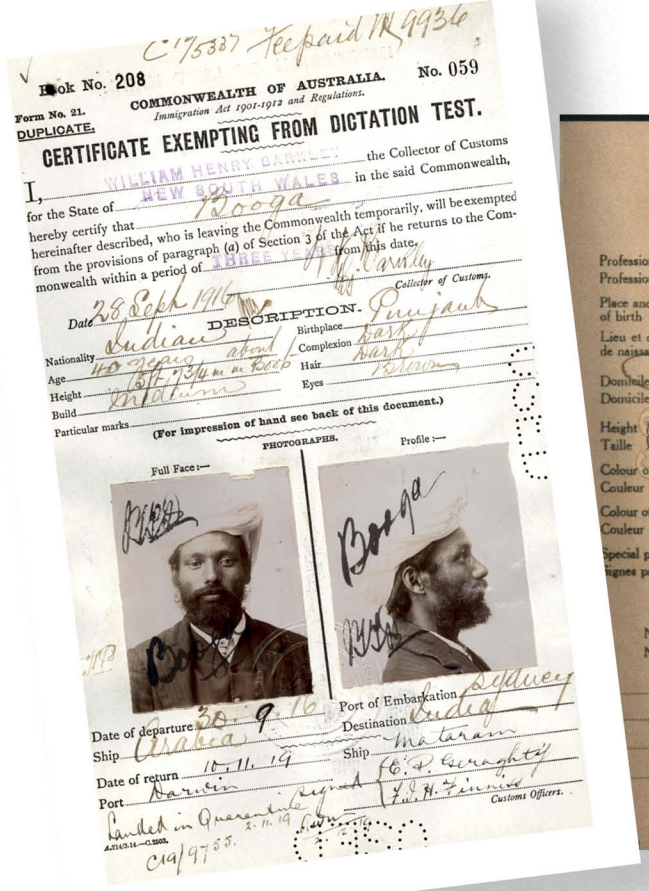
complexity of identity he has lived with for decades.

On visits to India, he was the foreigner, the 'firangi.' Like so many children of the diaspora, he felt caught between two worlds. "There's always a part of you that feels somewhat missing. You're kind of in between two worlds."

A Melbourne-based tech worker, Bedi decided to bring that analytical mindset to the past. He began searching—following hints, databases and records through the National Archives.

The digital trail led him to a trove of documents: a British passport, a Certificate of Exemption from the White Australia era, and personal letters. He even discovered a four-year-old uncle whose existence his 96-year-old grandfather never knew about.

He then connected with Len Kenna and Crystal Jade of the Australian Indian Historical Society, the guardians of this overlooked past. They had interviewed his great-grandfather and confirmed a story Bedi had dismissed as family legend: that his ancestors, upon landing at the Port of Melbourne, walked 4,000 kilometres to the cane fields of Far North Queensland.



Book No. 208 — COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA. — No. 059
Form No. 21. DUPLICATE. Immigration Act 1901-1912 and Regulations.

CERTIFICATE EXEMPTING FROM DICTATION TEST.

I, WILLIAM HENRY BARLEY, the Collector of Customs for the State of NEW SOUTH WALES in the said Commonwealth, hereby certify that Booga who is leaving the Commonwealth temporarily, will be exempted from the provisions of paragraph (a) of Section 3 of the Act if he returns to the Commonwealth within a period of THREE YEARS from this date.

Date 28 Sept 1916 — W. H. Barley, Collector of Customs.

DESCRIPTION.

Nationality Indian — Birthplace Punjaub
Age 40 years about — Complexion dark
Height 5ft 7¼ in in Boots — Hair Black
Build Medium — Eyes Brown
Particular marks —

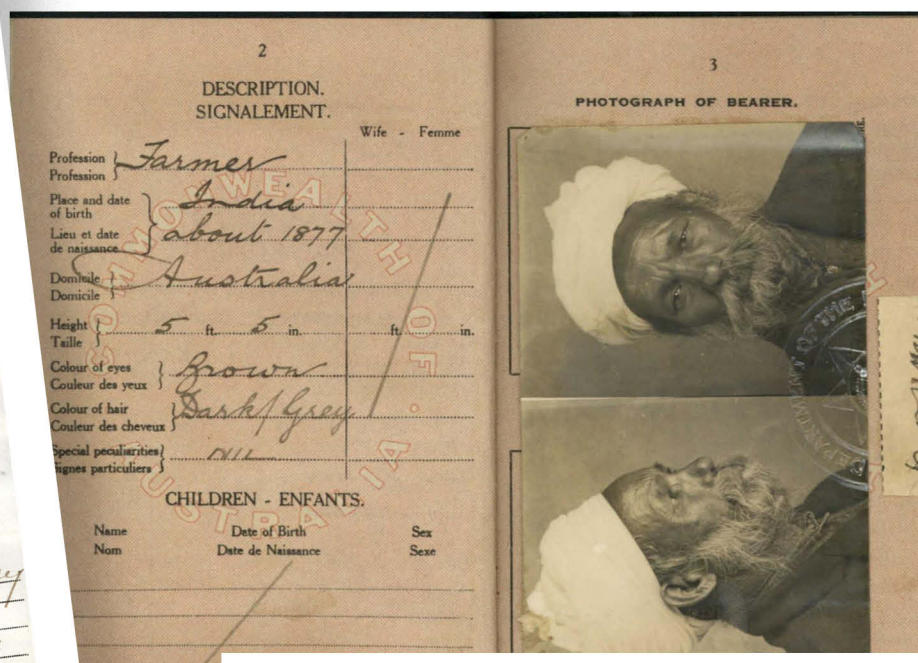
(For impression of hand see back of this document.)

PHOTOGRAPHS. Full Face :— Profile :—

Date of departure 30. 9. 16 — Port of Embarkation Sydney
Ship Arabia — Destination India
Date of return 10. 11. 19 — Ship Mataram
Port Darwin — signed C. P. Cavaghy, H. T. Timms, Customs Officers.

Landed in Quarantine 2. 11. 19 Cavaghy

C19/9755.



2 — DESCRIPTION. SIGNALEMENT.

Wife - Femme

Profession / Profession: Farmers
Place and date of birth / Lieu et date de naissance: India about 1877
Domicile / Domicile: Australia
Height / Taille: 5 ft. 6 in. — ft. — in.
Colour of eyes / Couleur des yeux: Brown
Colour of hair / Couleur des cheveux: Dark Grey
Special peculiarities / Signes particuliers: Nil

CHILDREN - ENFANTS.

Name / Nom — Date of Birth / Date de Naissance — Sex / Sexe

3 — PHOTOGRAPH OF BEARER.





> I did it for my children. I wanted them to know that our history runs very deep here
>
> **MANMEET SINGH BEDI**

"They said, 'No, that's historical fact,'" Bedi recalls. "A number of people died. Aboriginal people helped them through the bush."

The stories were humbling and extraordinary. To communicate, they would moo like cows for milk or mime chickens laying eggs. They were British subjects from Punjab, helping to prop up a pre-federation Australian economy as hawkers, cane cutters, and banana farmers.

This discovery was seismic. "It completely changed the way I saw myself," he says. "For the first time in almost 40 years, I feel like I'm part of both worlds. I can stand a lot taller."

But when he tried to explain this deep history to his two young children, he hit a wall. "They're like, 'Was that when you were born?' It just went above their head."

So he decided to write it down. The result is a children's picture book with a poetic title: Where the Mustard Fields Meet the Southern Cross. It evokes the mustard fields of Punjab under the Southern Cross constellation, a journey from one world to another, ending with the line, "Two worlds, one loving home."

"I did it for my children," he says. "I wanted them to know that our history runs very deep here." His three-year-old is now obsessed, requesting it every night. "He understands now. When they hear '1885', they get it."

Self-published last December, the book has sold hundreds of copies and sparked conversations far beyond the Indian community. Friends of Polish, Irish, and Greek descent have approached him, sharing their own migrant family stories. "It opened up this beautiful conversation that, unless you're a First Nations person, everyone here is a migrant."

The book is more than a family history; it's a deliberate intervention in the national story. Bedi feels a new responsibility as a custodian of this legacy. "If you're told to 'go back to where you come from', it's like, 'Well, I probably came here before you did.' It changes the discussion."

He has met with mayors and MPs, sharing the story not for sales, but for recognition. "We've been here for over 140 years. We should know that and be very proud of that."

Does knowing this deep history free him from having to prove his Australianness? "I think it probably creates more pressure, to be honest. You still probably don't feel fully accepted... but I understand where I belong now."

His quest has reframed the migrant's question. It is no longer "How do I belong?" but "What do I want to build, knowing I already belong?"

As historian Len Kenna told him: "How can a tree stand tall if it doesn't have strong roots?" Bedi has found his roots, buried deep in Australian soil for 140 years. Now, through a simple children's book, he is ensuring a new generation can grow up standing tall, knowing their story is, and always has been, part of this country's story.

"You should carry kindness across every ocean," he says, explaining the message of his book.

Perhaps that is the quiet power of his discovery: it doesn't just locate one family in history. It widens the map of who has always been here and the legacy carried forward.

Where the Mustard Fields Meet the Southern Cross is available to purchase. Click here.

Where to buy: https://amzn.asia/d/g7UE2AM

Pregnancy supplements: What you need and what you don't

DR. PREETI KHILLAN
@the_indian_sun

A young couple walks into a pharmacy in Melbourne's west, both excited and anxious. Their parents are overseas. Friends and relatives mean well but send a flood of messages: "Buy the most expensive prenatal." "Take extra iron just in case." "You must use methylfolate because of MTHFR." The shelves are packed with bright labels promising a "smarter pregnancy" and a "healthier baby".

For many multicultural women in Australia, especially first-time mums without close family support, supplements become emotional insurance. The fear is real: what if I miss something and my baby isn't healthy? But here is the truth I often share in clinic: more pills do not automatically mean more protection. Sometimes, it means unnecessary cost, confusion, and even risk.

THE TWO ESSENTIALS MOST WOMEN NEED

If you remember only two words, make them: **folic acid and iodine**.

Folic acid (the supplement form of folate, vitamin B9) is most important in the earliest weeks of pregnancy, often before a woman even knows she is pregnant. It helps reduce the risk of serious early birth defects affecting the baby's brain and spine (neural tube defects such as spina bifida). Most guidelines advise 400 to 600 micrograms daily, ❮TURN TO #47❯



Representational Photo by Devon Divine on Unsplash+

Navigating pregnancy supplements can be overwhelming. Here's a doctor's simple, evidence-based guide to what you truly need and what to avoid

CONTINUED FROM #46 ideally starting at least a month before conception and continuing through the first 12 weeks of pregnancy. Some women need a higher dose (often 5 mg daily) if they have specific risk factors, for example a previous pregnancy affected by a neural tube defect, certain medical conditions, or specific medications. That higher dose should be guided by your GP or obstetric team.

Iodine supports the baby's brain and nervous system development. Women are generally advised to take 150 micrograms daily when planning pregnancy, during pregnancy, and while breastfeeding. Women with thyroid conditions should seek tailored medical advice first.

Australia also fortifies certain staple foods, including some bread products, with folic acid and iodine (via iodised salt in bread). This has helped reduce neural tube defects across the population, but it does not replace correct supplement timing, especially for folic acid early on.

FOLIC ACID VS METHYLFOLATE: THE MARKETING CONFUSION

Many newer prenatal brands replace folic acid with methylfolate and advertise it as "more bioavailable". It is usually more expensive. The important point is this: folic acid is the form with the strongest evidence for preventing neural tube defects.

You may have heard about the MTHFR gene, which is common in many populations. Even with MTHFR variations, most people can still process folic acid. The problem is not your genetics; it is how fear-based marketing can make normal women feel "defective" and pressured into costly choices.

WHEN "MORE" BECOMES HARMFUL

In pregnancy, supplement stacking is common: a prenatal multivitamin, plus a "hair and skin" vitamin, plus magnesium gummies, plus an energy drink, plus a morning-sickness tablet. The same nutrients appear in multiple products without you realising.

Vitamin B6 is a classic example. It can be present in pregnancy vitamins, nausea tablets, magnesium blends, and energy products. In high doses over time, B6 can cause nerve damage, and Australia's medicines regulator has issued safety warnings because harm has occurred, often from taking several products at once.

High-dose vitamin A can also be dangerous in pregnancy. Even for nutrients that are helpful in the right amount, there can be a "sweet spot": too little is not ideal, but too much may not be helpful and may carry risks depending on the vitamin and the person.

A safe rule: avoid non-pregnancy multivitamins and avoid taking multiple products unless your clinician has reviewed the full list.

FOOD FIRST, BUT MAKE IT REALISTIC

A nourishing diet still matters more than any "perfect" supplement. Yet multicultural families face real barriers: nausea, food aversions, long work hours, unfamiliar foods, vegetarian diets, cultural food rules, cost-of-living pressures, and the loneliness of doing pregnancy without the village you expected.

Rather than chasing perfection, aim for practical wins: regular meals, iron-rich foods (or vegetarian iron options), dairy or calcium-enriched alternatives, colourful vegetables when tolerated, and safe protein sources. If you are worried you are not eating well, ask your GP or midwife for a referral to an accredited dietitian, ideally someone comfortable with your cultural foods.

THE "BRING-PEACE-OF-MIND" PLAN

Choose one pregnancy-appropriate supplement that covers folic acid and iodine at recommended doses. Do not add extra tablets "just because". If iron or other supplements are needed, they should be based on your history and blood tests, not guesswork.

Here is my strongest tip: bring every bottle, blister pack, powder, and herbal product to one appointment and ask, "Can you check these together?" One careful review can prevent months of confusion and protect you from accidental overdosing.

Pregnancy already comes with enough worry. Your supplement plan should be simple, evidence-based, and personalised, so you can focus less on the pharmacy aisle and more on the joy of meeting your baby.

MYTHS VS FACTS

✕ Myth: "A pregnancy multivitamin is compulsory for every woman."

✓ Fact: Most women mainly need folic acid (early) and iodine (through pregnancy and breastfeeding). The rest depends on diet, blood tests, and individual risk.

✕ Myth: "The more vitamins I take, the healthier my baby will be."

✓ Fact: More is not always better. Taking several products can push some nutrients too high and cause harm.

✕ Myth: "If I'm tired, I must be low in iron, so I should start iron tablets."

✓ Fact: Do not guess. Iron supplementation should be based on blood tests and medical advice.

✕ Myth: "Methylfolate is always better than folic acid."

✓ Fact: Folic acid has the strongest proof for preventing neural tube defects. Do not pay extra out of fear.

✕ Myth: "Natural, herbal, or imported tablets are safe because they are 'traditional'."

✓ Fact: "Natural" does not always mean safe in pregnancy. Always check with your GP, obstetrician, or pharmacist before using herbal or imported products.

✕ Myth: "If I didn't take folic acid before pregnancy, it's too late."

✓ Fact: Start as soon as you know you are pregnant. It still helps.

Dr Preeti Khillan is a Melbourne-based obstetrician and gynaecologist with extensive experience caring for women from diverse cultural backgrounds across all stages of pregnancy and birth



Australia keeps borders unchanged as Nipah cases reported in India

Nipah Virus particles // Photo by National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases on Unsplash

Australia will maintain current border protocols despite Nipah virus cases in India, assessing the risk as low and existing health measures as sufficient

OUR REPORTER
@the_indian_sun

Australia will not tighten border controls following the detection of two cases of the Nipah virus in India, with the federal government saying existing health protocols for arriving travellers remain appropriate.

The virus has been identified in two people in the eastern Indian state of West Bengal, prompting heightened screening measures in parts of Asia, including at some airports. Nipah is most commonly spread by fruit bats and, while infections in humans are rare, the World Health Organisation says it carries a fatality rate of between 40 and 75 per cent.

Federal Health Minister Mark Butler said authorities were monitoring developments closely but had received no advice to alter current arrangements for people arriving in Australia.



Federal Health Minister Mark Butler

"We don't have any advice at the moment to change our existing protocols for sick travellers who arrive in Australia. There already are protocols for that, but we'll continue to watch the situation closely," Mr Butler told ABC Radio National.

He added there was cautious optimism about the situation overseas. "There's reason to hope that this has been contained."

Australian health officials say the risk locally remains low, noting that the virus has never been detected in Australia and that existing procedures are designed to identify and manage unwell passengers at the border.

Australian health officials say the risk locally remains low, noting that the virus has never been detected in Australia and that existing procedures are designed to identify and manage unwell passengers at the border.

The focus, they say, is on vigilance rather than disruption, as international authorities respond to the isolated cases reported in India late last year.

While several countries across Asia have stepped up health checks for travellers from affected regions, Australian officials have stressed that the circumstances do not warrant changes at home. The government's position reflects a broader assessment that, despite its severity, Nipah remains rare and is being closely tracked by global health bodies.

Australian authorities say they will keep reviewing advice as new information emerges, while urging calm and attention to official guidance.

A new 'Super-K' flu is spreading fast. Here's what CSIRO says



Representational Photo by CDC on Unsplash

Rapidly spreading "Super-K" flu emerges early in Australia, with current vaccines potentially less effective but still crucial for reducing severe illness

OUR REPORTER
@the_indian_sun

A new report by CSIRO says a fast-spreading influenza strain, nicknamed the "Super-K" flu, is emerging earlier than expected and spreading rapidly across Australia.

CSIRO disease prevention and detection expert Dr Daniel Layton said subclade K is spreading earlier than is typical for seasonal influenza, which is a cause for concern.

"While this is still a seasonal flu strain, it has changed significantly in one of its key proteins," Dr Layton said. "These changes can affect how easily the virus spreads and how well our immune system recognises it."

CSIRO said early data suggests the current flu vaccine may be less effective at preventing infection from subclade K due to a mismatch between the vaccine and the mutated virus.



Dr Daniel Layton is an expert immunologist working at CSIRO's Australian Centre for Disease Preparedness // CSIRO photo

However, vaccination is still expected to reduce the severity of illness.

"The flu vaccine works by producing antibodies that block the virus from entering our cells," Dr Layton said. "Because this strain has changed, those antibodies may not bind as well, but the vaccine can still help prevent severe disease."

According to CSIRO, flu seasons dominated by H3N2 strains have historically been associated with higher hospitalisation rates, particularly among older people and those with underlying health conditions. However, there is currently no evidence that subclade K causes more severe illness in individual cases.

CSIRO said people who received a flu vaccine in 2025 are not generally advised to get an additional dose at this time, as protection is strongest in the first three to four months after vaccination. A new seasonal flu vaccine is expected to become available in Australia in the coming months.

Those in high-risk groups who missed last year's flu shot may still benefit from vaccination and should speak with their GP, CSIRO advised.

Looking ahead, CSIRO said continued monitoring will determine whether future flu vaccines need to be updated to include subclade K. Decisions on vaccine composition are made using global surveillance data and expert analysis.

CSIRO also reminded the public that flu symptoms typically come on suddenly and include fever or chills, body aches, headache, extreme tiredness, and cough or sore throat. Anyone experiencing worsening symptoms or at higher risk of complications is advised to seek medical advice.

Where India's youth turn scrap into skill and opportunity



DEEPIKA SAHU
@menondeepika

It's a park with a difference. When you walk into this park, you will find a 7-ft and 6-ft-long, 120 kg elephant sculpture made from tyres, MS round rods and cut steel sheets, or a 150 kg Ganesha idol made from bearings, cranks, chains, axles, nuts and mild steel components. The **Waste to Wealth Skill Park** at the Govt Polytechnic, Bhubaneswar (Odisha) takes you to a space in which discarded materials find a second life. Spread across this park are towering sculptures—some rising up to 35 feet—crafted from automobile scrap, e-waste, worn-out tyres and rubble from demolished buildings. Together, they stand as bold reminders that waste, when reimagined, can become wealth.

Each installation is thoughtfully mapped to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, ensuring that the creativity on display is also anchored in global sustainability priorities. For students, the park doubles as a hands-on training ground, linking technical skills with real-world environmental challenges and preparing them for emerging green careers.

What sets the park apart is its evolution beyond static art. Several sculptures have transformed into live projects embedded with smart automation and digital technologies, seamlessly blending traditional craftsmanship with modern innovation. As a living showcase of circular economy practices, the Waste to Wealth Skill Park redefines how technical education can inspire, innovate and regenerate.

Talking about this unique project, which has been gaining attention across the country and neighbouring countries, Dr Rajat Kumar Panigrahi, principal of Govt Polytechnic, also popularly known as the Scrap Man of Odisha, says, "Technical institutes like Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) are vital for equipping India's youth with the skills needed to join the workforce. However, a significant gap often exists between the skills of ITI students and industry requirements. As part of their training, ITIs also generate substantial amounts of waste, including metal, iron, electronic components and other discarded spare parts. To address these issues, this unique initiative, Waste to Wealth, comes as a perfect solution."

Through this initiative, scrap material is converted into visually interesting sculptures, showpieces and timepieces, which not only reduce waste but also provide students with hands-on experience in waste management and encourage them to work with waste materials.

How does this process work? Explaining it, Panigrahi says, "There's a meticulously designed process which 〈TURN TO #51〉



Govt Polytechnic students honing skills during a hands-on workshop // Photo supplied



A glimpse of the Waste to Wealth Skill Park // Photo supplied

> Technical institutes like Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) are vital for equipping India's youth with the skills needed to join the workforce. However, a significant gap often exists between the skills of ITI students and industry requirements
>
> **DR RAJAT KUMAR PANIGRAHI**
> **PRINCIPAL–GOVT POLYTECHNIC**



A 7-ft tyre elephant sculpture // Photo supplied

CONTINUED FROM #50

starts with skill assessments to ensure the curriculum aligns with the trainees' minds. Assessment of scrap diversity helps identify materials suitable for transformation. Thoughtfully tailored training modules equip students with upcycling techniques and provide them with tools and dedicated workspaces. The work and processes are continuously monitored, and feedback is provided to ensure ongoing skill improvement and creativity."

Trainees from various trades like welding, painting, fitting and electrical are part of the project and expand their skills and application of mind. The multi-trade approach enhances team spirit and communication while providing diverse skill experience to students. Emphasis on the 'hearts-on, hands-on and minds-on' approach fosters student engagement and inspires them to create.

The Waste to Wealth initiative goes beyond learning about waste management by fostering entrepreneurial spirit, creativity and critical thinking, offering additional career pathways.

The Waste to Wealth initiative focuses on producing value through the upcycling of scrap materials, thereby promoting sustainable practices. It also emphasises students' interest in welding and improving their hands-on skills through practical application in artistic upcycling projects. Students also get an opportunity to earn money while they learn.

Panigrahi adds, "Upcycling is the new mantra. Metal scraps and e-waste can be upcycled beautifully, and these can be potential materials for India's ever-growing interior design industry too. We want to create awareness by becoming a link between the educational institute and the community. The skill park is all about pushing creative boundaries. The students are working with their hands. India's manufacturing industry can't run without qualified manpower. For the students, it has been a great learning experience."

Interestingly, the students even put up a fashion show on the theme of Waste to Wealth. From outfits made out of plastic bottles to jackets made out of e-waste, it was all about imagination, creativity and creation. Through this unique initiative, Odisha is creating Waste to Wealth warriors across different industries and thereby setting a new blueprint for technical education.

***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.*

@menondeepika
@moodydeepika
/Deepika Sahu

India's Gay Prince: Cast out, still changing the system



DEEPIKA SAHU
@menondeepika

Manvendra Singh Gohil chose to live a life that defied both tradition and expectation. The prince of the erstwhile Rajpipla royal family and one of India's most prominent LGBTQ rights activists, Manvendra's journey has been shaped by courage and conviction rather than comfort. When he came out publicly about his sexual orientation in 2006, he faced fierce protests, outrage and exclusion. Nearly two decades later, he stands in a very different place—calmer, stronger, and determined to create awareness, advocacy and a safe space for the LGBTQ community.

He first appeared on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, a popular American talk show, in 2007, where he spoke about the importance of recognising LGBTQ+ rights. Looking back, he says, "Oprah's show made a lot of difference, as she is a global personality. Her presence and her being a strong ally definitely opened doors. It did help a lot in changing people's mindsets, and I also got many invitations to participate in events in different countries."

Gohil, who turned 60 in 2025, has now created the Manvendra Foundation to carry forward his ground-breaking work on issues involving inclusion and embracing diversity. Explaining the need, he says, "Turning 60 in 2025 made me reflective. I was planning to be more inclusive as I grew older. Inclusivity has given me acceptance. It is about embracing different communities. The majority of Rajpipla's population comes from tribal communities, and I have been working for their empowerment. Similarly, I have also been working for the welfare of the African Siddi community in Gujarat."

Manvendra has been doing pioneering work for the LGBTQ community for years through his Lakshya Trust. He is also the co-founder of Search Ends Inclusion Impact, along with Siddharth Ayare and Chandrika Ayare. The initiative focuses on inclusion and equity, DEI sensitisation, leadership awareness, and building inclusive organisational cultures through lived-experience–led interventions.

Talking about the philosophy behind starting the Manvendra Foundation, he says, "I want the good work to continue even after I am gone. That's why I started the Manvendra Foundation. The foundation is centred on the needs of the LGBTQ community, persons living with disabilities, women and war veterans. I decided to work equally for these four pillars, with a focus on intersectionality.

"This quest for inclusivity has worked for me earlier, and I wanted to take it forward. For example, how many organisations in India today have provisions for sanitary pads at the workplace for women professionals? This may seem like a simple thing, but during our interactions, we found that not many organisations have this provision."

Gohil is a strong believer in building allies. He feels that for same-sex marriage laws to become a reality in India, the LGBTQ community needs allies.

For him, allies are individuals who are not part of the LGBTQ+ community. They are people who are willing not only to accept but also to openly stand with the community, lend support and advocate for its rights. "Without allies, it is going to be a tough battle. We need the support of political leaders, spiritual leaders, educational ❮TURN TO #53❯







> To be fair, during my long journey of activism, I have realised that we can't blame people; we can only blame ignorance. Once we create awareness and engage with people on issues faced by LGBTQ community members, I see a ray of light

MANVENDRA SINGH GOHIL



<CONTINUED FROM #52>

institutions and thought leaders," he says.

Despite the struggles and hardships faced by the LGBTQ community, Gohil remains hopeful about the future. He says, "To be fair, during my long journey of activism, I have realised that we can't blame people; we can only blame ignorance. Once we create awareness and engage with people on issues faced by LGBTQ community members, I see a ray of light.

"I am now working with the education ministry on textbooks. I have been giving talks at schools across the country. I have been privileged to see openness among young students and their parents, and that makes me hopeful."

Amid the constant process of creating awareness and fighting for justice, there have been developments that have brought joy to the LGBTQ community. Recently, the Reserve Bank of India introduced new guidelines that were welcomed by the community. Same-sex partners can now open joint bank accounts and nominate their partners. However, there is still a need to fight for inheritance rights.

Manvendra is also a strong advocate of the pink economy and pink tourism. He says, "If India creates a safe environment for pink tourism, we can earn significant foreign exchange. With its diverse landscape, palaces and heritage monuments, India has the potential to emerge as a pink tourism destination but we need a safe and inclusive environment for all to succeed."

What advice would he give to young members of the queer community? "Acceptance is the key. Only with self-acceptance can one move forward and live a life of dignity. At the same time, one must remember that if you choose to come out, you need to be socially and economically independent. You need to build your own ecosystem."

Even as he focuses on improving the lives of diverse communities and building an old-age home in a happy personal space. Talking about his 12-year marriage to Duke DeAndre Richardson, he says, "I have always wanted a life companion. I believe the soul has no gender. I am American, and our relationship is built on the solid foundation of friendship. He is my best friend. We try to be together as much as possible. He can live in India for six months at a stretch. Marriage gives me a wonderful way to share and care. Just the thought of having somebody is beautiful and reassuring."

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.*

@menondeepika
@moodydeepika
/Deepika Sahu

FROM ALL SIDES





Sex, Family & Suburbia: Inside Bina Bhattacharya's "From All Sides"

Filmmaker **Bina Bhattacharya**'s debut feature *From All Sides* confronts Australian family life, racism and desire, centring a multiracial, bisexual household navigating pressures from every direction

INDIRA LAISRAM
@indira_laisram

When **Bina Bhattacharya** set out to make her first feature film, she wasn't trying to shock audiences. She was trying to tell the truth as she saw it.

"I wanted to make a film about how I see the world," Bhattacharya tells *The Indian Sun* from her Sydney home. "Middle Australia has changed, but our cinema hasn't really caught up."

That truth arrives this weekend. Her debut, *From All Sides*, centres on Anoushka and Pascal, a married, multiracial bisexual couple in Western Sydney raising two teenage children while navigating an open relationship. Here, sex is part of the story, but so are school runs, work pressures, microaggressions and the emotional labour of modern family life. It will screen at The Sun Theatre in Yaraville ahead of a wider cinema run and an SBS broadcast later in 2026.

The film is a project born from a long-simmering personal frustration. "At the time I was writing, I was getting older and I had a lot of rage," Bhattacharya admits. "About racism, condescension, not being valued."

Her own story is one of navigating different worlds: her father is Bengali, from Kolkata; her mother is white, from Adelaide. She grew up in Australia in the 1990s, where she saw little of herself on screen.

"There was no Indian representation on TV." Her connection to that culture came from home. "My father loved movies. I grew up watching Satyajit Ray films. I also loved popular Indian cinema. I can sing all the songs from *Disco Dancer*."

But the road to making her film was long. After graduating from film school in 2007, she faced years of closed doors. "I'm realising now that there was a lot of unconscious bias," she reflects. "An unwillingness to hire someone who looked or sounded a little bit different." **<TURN TO #57>**







That constant uncertainty—Was that racism, or am I imagining it?—is what she wanted to capture. In the film, pressure comes from all directions: a dismissive boss, tense in-law dynamics, competitive dance parents, and the endless lift of motherhood









CONTINUED FROM #55

A decade in the public service and a stint in London followed. It wasn't until she returned to Australia in 2015, and later wrote for the anthology film *Here Out West*, that her path to directing cleared.

From All Sides channels that journey. Bhattacharya grew frustrated with how racism and South Asian characters are typically portrayed. "We always see the same version—someone loud, someone overt," she says. "What I experienced was more subtle: people talking down to you, not valuing your contributions."

That constant uncertainty—Was that racism, or am I imagining it?—is what she wanted to capture. In the film, pressure comes from all directions: a dismissive boss, tense in-law dynamics, competitive dance parents, and the endless lift of motherhood.

The open relationship, she insists, is not the central conflict. "It's just one part of her (protagonist Anouska) life," she says. "The stress mostly comes from outside."

Hence the title. "When you're a woman with a family, you get it *From All Sides*."

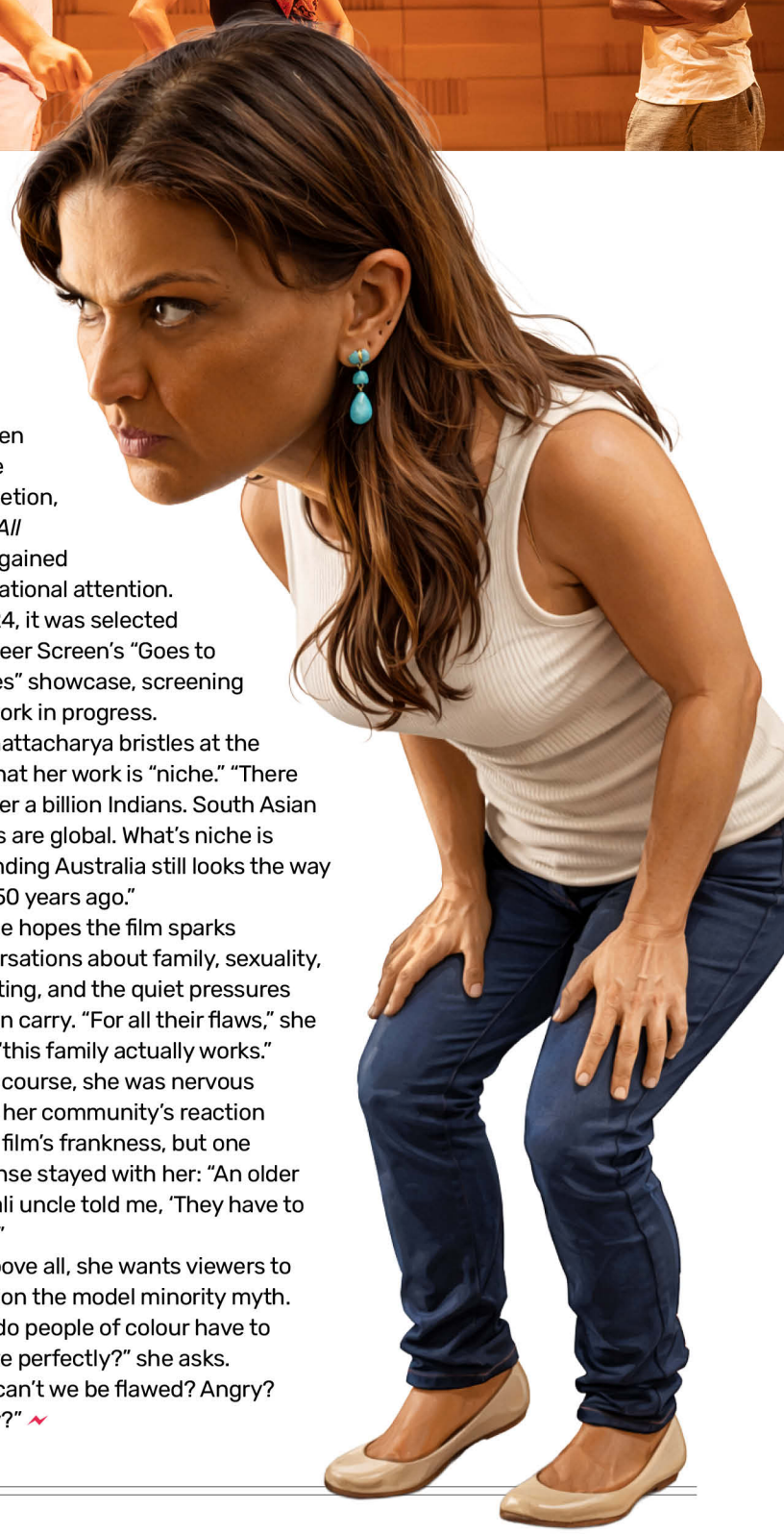
The film is quietly landmark in what it chooses not to do. It is one of the rare Australian films to explore bisexuality and polyamory without leaning on tropes of jealousy or moral panic. Instead, the relationship is treated as negotiated, imperfect, and lived-in—neither glamourised nor condemned.

It is also trailblazing in representation. At its centre is a middle-aged Indian-Australian woman, played by Monique Kalmar—a demographic almost never positioned as the emotional or sexual core of an Australian feature. "It's always sexless, always self-deprecating," Bhattacharya says of common South Asian portrayals. "It's never cool, smart, sophisticated people who have their lives together."

Some viewers, she notes, find Anoushka "too brassy" or "too outspoken." "But the compass is very different for people of colour," she adds. "If we transgress, we're punished more."

The film also weaves in classical Indian dance, a deliberate choice that draws a sharp contrast in cultural value and recognition. Bhattacharya was inspired by the politics of dance itself.

"I was very nervous about this, but I just love Indian classical dance," she admits. "I was very interested in the politics of it. I grew up with a white mother who loves classical music, and I love ballet, too. But we have whole ballet companies in Australia that are very posh. They get a big theatre, people pay lots of money, and they have lots of patronage. And then we also have fabulous Bharatanatyam dancers who are rehearsing in garages."



Even before completion, *From All Sides* gained international attention. In 2024, it was selected for Queer Screen's "Goes to Cannes" showcase, screening as a work in progress.

Bhattacharya bristles at the idea that her work is "niche." "There are over a billion Indians. South Asian stories are global. What's niche is pretending Australia still looks the way it did 50 years ago."

She hopes the film sparks conversations about family, sexuality, parenting, and the quiet pressures women carry. "For all their flaws," she says, "this family actually works."

Of course, she was nervous about her community's reaction to the film's frankness, but one response stayed with her: "An older Bengali uncle told me, 'They have to learn.'"

Above all, she wants viewers to question the model minority myth. "Why do people of colour have to behave perfectly?" she asks. "Why can't we be flawed? Angry? Messy?"



Sydney's Sathyan Ilanko drops "NEERODA" & writes for AR Rahman

OUR REPORTER
@the_indian_sun

Sydney-based Tamil musician **Sathyan Ilanko** has taken a major step forward in his music career with the release of his debut solo single 'NEERODA', marking his transition from behind-the-scenes lyricist to independent artist.

Released on 23 January, 'NEERODA' is now streaming on YouTube, Spotify, Amazon Music, Deezer and Tidal. The track is a fully self-driven project, with Ilanko composing the music, writing the lyrics, singing, and performing in the music video—a milestone that highlights his growing creative range.

"Finally it's out. Hundreds and thousands of people's dreams and hard work have come true," Ilanko's mother Subashini told *The Indian Sun*. She also revealed that her son has written a song for legendary music director A R Rahman for the Tamil film *Moonwalk*, which is set for release in May. The song is titled 'Jiger'.

"The album for the movie was released on 4 January, and Sathyan travelled to India for the audio launch," she said.

The releases follows a breakthrough year for the young artist. In 2024, Ilanko shot to international attention with 'Aasa Kooda', a Tamil song that became a global hit after its release in India on June 13. Sung and composed by siblings Sai Abhyankkar and Sai Smriti, the song featured Ilanko's lyrics and went on to rack up millions of views and widespread social media traction, particularly among Tamil audiences worldwide.

While 'Aasa Kooda' introduced Ilanko to a global audience, his journey in music began much earlier. In 2019, at just 16, he made his playback singing debut in the Tamil film *Aduththa Sattai*, performing two songs—an early sign of the cross-continental career that was to follow.

Currently in India completing several ongoing projects, Ilanko is expected to return to Australia in February. With 'NEERODA' marking his arrival as a solo artist and high-profile film collaborations underway, the Sydney-raised musician is fast emerging as a distinctive voice connecting the Tamil diaspora with India's mainstream music industry.







The Bulbul Sings Again: Aakash Odedra returns to Melbourne



OUR REPORTER
@the_indian_sun

Aakash Odedra's return to Australia has been set, with his acclaimed solo work *Songs of the Bulbul* scheduled for the Playhouse at Arts Centre Melbourne from 3 to 7 February 2026. The British choreographer and dancer, whose work has travelled widely and shaped conversations around classical and contemporary Indian dance, brings a production that has drawn praise across Europe and picked up the Best Show Award at the Edinburgh International Festival.

Songs of the Bulbul is rooted in the Sufi tale of a nightingale held in captivity, using the bird's final song as a metaphor for fleeting beauty and the human search for meaning. The piece uses Kathak, Sufi storytelling and a score by composer Rushil Ranjan to build a dialogue between physical intensity and spiritual reflection. The work asks a question that runs through Sufi poetry: whether we stay bound to the material world or seek a release that offers another kind of freedom.

The story of the bird draws a clear path through the work. As its despair deepens, its song grows sweeter, turning its last notes into a moment of defiance and grace before the soul escapes its confinement. Odedra uses this progression to shape a performance that moves between delicacy and force, guided by the traditions he has trained in since childhood and the collaborations that frame his work. He developed the piece with choreographer Rani Khanam, bringing together poetry, music and rhythmic footwork into a single thread.

The Edinburgh season established the work's reputation. Critics described it as "a mesmerising tour de force" and "a profound exploration of freedom and the human spirit," recognising both its precision and its emotional weight. *The Guardian* called it "a song of beauty and light and life," while *The Scotsman* described it as "a work of exquisite beauty and sadness… the kind of theatrical moment that stays with you forever."

The Aakash Odedra Company, founded in Leicester in 2011, has long drawn from classical Indian forms such as Kathak and Bharatanatyam while giving them contemporary shape through a British Asian lens. The company has performed more than 600 full length works across 50 countries and continues to build partnerships with artists across music, dance and design.

Melbourne audiences last saw Odedra in the world premiere of Samsara as part of Asia TOPA 2020. The company returned in 2024 with *Little Murmur*, a production created for young people that reflected on Odedra's experience of dyslexia. *Songs of the Bulbul* marks a return to solo performance, with a work designed to carry both ferocity and contemplation in equal measure.

Following the Melbourne season, the production will travel to Perth Festival from 13 to 15 February 2026. The tour is presented by Far & Away Productions, with support from Manchester Camerata, Jacobs Pillow, Arts Council England and the British Council.

AFL sees momentum in India as CEO begins Mumbai visit



OUR REPORTER
@the_indian_sun

AFL chief executive **Andrew Dillon** has begun his India visit in Mumbai, describing the country as a market of growing opportunity as the league looks to deepen its international reach.

"Starting the week here in Mumbai really brings home the scale of opportunity for AFL in India," Dillon said.

The week-long visit forms part of the AFL's longer-term strategy to build a foothold in India, which the league views as one of the world's largest and fastest growing sports markets. Dillon is scheduled to meet sports commissioners, business figures and community leaders before travelling to Ranchi later in the week for the AFL India National Championships.

"India is one of the world's largest and fastest growing sports markets, **TURN TO #63**







> I'm looking forward to meeting with a range of business and community leaders over the coming days, and I can't wait to attend the AFL India National Championships in Ranchi this weekend
>
> **ANDREW DILLON**

<CONTINUED FROM #62> and we're seeing genuine momentum, with close to 10,000 people currently playing footy across the country," Dillon said.

Australian rules football has been played in India since 2008, when participation began with about 150 players. Since then, more than 20,000 people across 11 states have taken part in the game. The 2026 AFL India National Championships will be held in Ranchi, Jharkhand, from 30 January to 1 February, featuring around 250 male players and more than 45 women.

Broadcast and language access have become part of the AFL's India strategy, aimed at reaching audiences beyond traditional markets. "The first ever AFL broadcast in Hindi during last year's Cultural Heritage Series between the Western Bulldogs and GWS was a significant milestone in opening the game up to new audiences, and we're excited to be delivering that initiative again this year," Dillon said.

The trip also reflects a broader effort to link international growth with engagement at home. An India-Australia roundtable held last year, involving Dillon, Dr Sushil Kumar, the Consul-General of India, and the Centre for Australia India Relations, explored ways the AFL could better connect with the Indian diaspora in Australia.

That conversation has fed into wider ambitions for the code. With a goal of reaching one million participants by 2033, the AFL is seeking to make the game more accessible to diverse audiences through initiatives such as alternate-language broadcasts, the returning Cultural Heritage Series and the AFL Desi platform.

"I'm looking forward to meeting with a range of business and community leaders over the coming days, and I can't wait to attend the AFL India National Championships in Ranchi this weekend," Dillon said.

As the visit unfolds, the league's focus remains on turning early interest into sustained participation, both in India and among Indian communities in Australia.

European T20 Premier League names Waugh, Maxwell as first franchise owners

Abhishek Bachchan, alongside Saurav Banerjee, helps launch **European T20 Premier League**, unveiling first franchises and signalling cricket's ambitious European expansion





OUR REPORTER
@the_indian_sun

The European T20 Premier League has unveiled the first three franchise owners ahead of its inaugural season in 2026, confirming Amsterdam, Edinburgh and Belfast as the league's foundation cities.

The ICC-sanctioned competition is co-founded by Abhishek Bachchan alongside Saurav Banerjee, Priyanka Kaul and Dhiraj Malhotra, and is backed by Cricket Ireland in partnership with Cricket Scotland and the Royal Dutch Cricket Association. The league will begin in late summer next year.

Amsterdam's franchise will be led by Australian great Steve Waugh, marking his return to the professional 〈TURN TO #65〉







> In many ways, it marks a return to the game for me—but in a very different role. This is about helping uphold the standards and spirit of cricket
>
> **STEVE WAUGH**

<CONTINUED FROM #64> game in an ownership role. Belfast has been secured by Australian all-rounder Glenn Maxwell, while Edinburgh will be guided by former New Zealand internationals Nathan McCullum and Kyle Mills.

The announcement was made at an international media event in Sydney, signalling the first phase of the league's franchise rollout.

Speaking on the vision behind the competition, Bachchan said the league was being built with a long-term outlook. "Anchored in strong partnerships with national boards and the greats of the game, ETPL will bring together established international stars alongside emerging talent from Europe and other associate nations, while upholding the highest standards of governance, transparency and sporting integrity, setting a new benchmark for emerging franchise leagues."

For Waugh, the decision to invest reflected both caution and ambition. "I've always been selective about where I invest my time and energy in cricket. Franchise cricket has expanded quickly, but this opportunity stood out because it is driven by aspiration and long-term thinking," he said. "In many ways, it marks a return to the game for me—but in a very different role. This is about helping uphold the standards and spirit of cricket while supporting its growth into Europe, which remains the game's last great frontier."

Maxwell said the Belfast project carried a strong cultural focus. "I am thrilled to be involved with the Irish Wolves, where we will build a culture of fun, family and playing without fear," he said. "The Irish people love their sport and Cricket Ireland have made huge strides in expanding the game over the last two decades. The Wolves and the European T20 Premier League will accelerate that growth and I feel super proud to be leading the franchise in its inaugural year."

From the Edinburgh camp, Mills highlighted the structure behind the league. "The opportunity to be part of franchise ownership in a league built with strong governance and deep board partnerships is hugely compelling," he said. "ETPL has all the ingredients to become a serious force in global cricket."

Europe currently accounts for nearly a third of the ICC's global membership, with 34 nations across the continent. The league's backers believe the combination of city-based franchises, international ownership and alignment with national boards can help convert that footprint into sustained professional pathways for players.

With its first franchises now confirmed and a launch window set for August 2026, the European T20 Premier League is positioning itself as a structured addition to the global calendar, aimed at lifting the profile of the game across Europe while remaining closely tied to its governing institutions.

Play on! sports vouchers return with $200 support for Queensland families

OUR REPORTER
@the_indian_sun

A new round of **Queensland's Play On! Sports Vouchers** opened on 29 January, offering families a $200 voucher for each eligible child to help cover the cost of organised sport.

Under Round 2 of the program, families can apply for one voucher per child aged between five and 17. The funding can be used towards membership, registration or participation fees with registered sporting clubs across the state. The initiative is aimed at easing household pressures while encouraging children to stay active as the school year begins.

The Queensland Government has committed $62.5 million each year for four years to continue the scheme, framing the investment as part of a broader cost of living response. A portion of vouchers has been set aside for children living with a disability, as well as those in regional and rural areas, reflecting ongoing concerns about access to sport outside metropolitan centres.

Minister for Sport and Racing and Minister for the Olympic and Paralympic Games Tim Mander said the start of the school year was a practical moment for families to consider organised sport, whether returning to familiar activities or trying something new. He acknowledged that rising expenses can influence decisions about extracurricular activities and said the program is designed to reduce that pressure for families and community clubs alike.

The government says the multi year funding commitment is intended to provide certainty for sporting organisations that rely on seasonal registrations, as well as for parents planning ahead. The program was previously scheduled to end, before the current government confirmed its continuation.

There are limits to eligibility. Children who received a voucher in Round 1 are not eligible to apply again in Round 2, and each child can only receive one voucher per financial year. Families are encouraged to check eligibility criteria carefully before applying.

Further details about the Play On! Sports Vouchers program, including how families can apply and how activity providers can register, are available here: ***https://tinyurl.com/3j3vhrr9***



AFC WOMEN'S ASIAN CUP AUSTRALIA 2026™

INDIA



MANISHA KALYAN

MUGGOWAL, PUNJAB

CLUB: PAOK FC

POSITION: FORWARD

Manisha Kalyan is a proud Punjabi who made history as the first Indian woman to play and score in the UEFA Women's Champions League. She has played professionally for top clubs in Greece and Cyprus and is one of India's top scorers. Manisha scored two goals against Timor-Leste in the AFC Women's Asian Cup Qualifiers.



SWEETY DEVI NGANGBAM

LANGTHABAL, IMPHAL WEST, MANIPUR

CLUB: EAST BENGAL FC

POSITION: DEFENDER

Born in Manipur, Sweety Devi Ngangbam is a rock solid defender who is the backbone of the Indian defence. The Bengal FC veteran has played 67 times for India and was captain of India in their opening match of the AFC Women's Asian Cup 2026 qualifiers.



PYARI XAXA

JHARTARANG, SUNDERGARH, ODISHA

CLUB: ODISHA FC

POSITION: FORWARD

Pyari Xaxa was raised is a small village in Odisha and has become one of India's most feared forwards, known for her lightning pace and instinctive finishing. She starred in the AFC Women's Asian Cup 2026 qualifiers including scoring five goals in India's win over Mongolia.

GET TICKETS!

VS

VIETNAM vs INDIA
WED 4 MARCH 2026
19:00 AWST
PERTH RECTANGULAR STADIUM

VS

INDIA vs JAPAN
SAT 7 MARCH 2026
19:00 AWST
PERTH RECTANGULAR STADIUM

VS

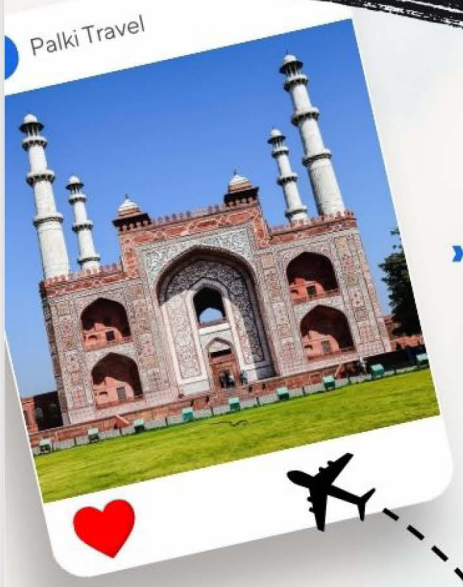
INDIA vs CHINESE TAIPEI
TUE 10 MARCH 2026
20:00 AEDT
WESTERN SYDNEY STADIUM

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