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THE Indian Sun PLUS

MAY 2026
VOLUME 15 ISSUE 192

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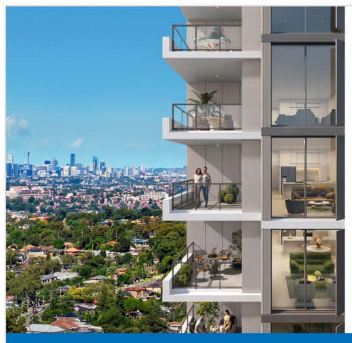
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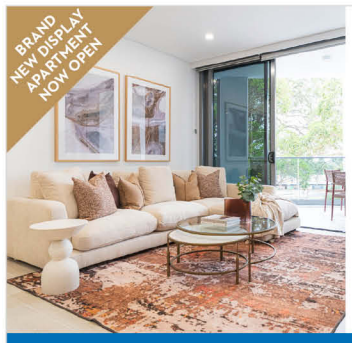
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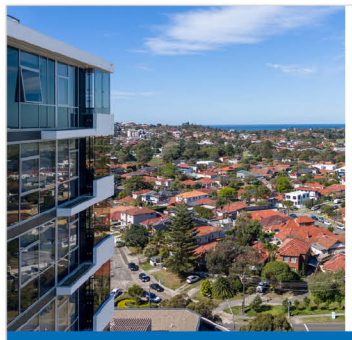
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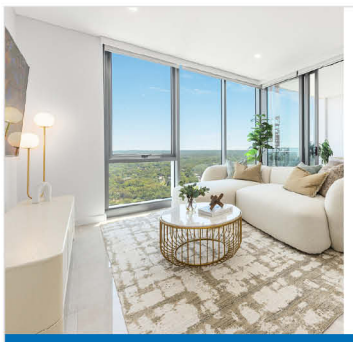
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LAST RATED DEC 2025

From Multicultural Hubs to Teen Champions: Queensland's Stories of Hope and Action



Dear Readers,

Welcome to our monthly round-up of voices shaping Queensland—from community builders and young creatives to advocates and lawmakers.

The Federation of Indian Communities of Queensland has turned a long-held vision into brick and mortar, with the foundation stone laid for the House of India at Augustine Heights. This is more than a building project; it is a declaration of belonging. With $5.5 million in federal backing and land gifted by Springfield's visionary Maha Sinnathamby, the centre will become a living room for Indian Australians—hosting arts, education, and faith gatherings. In a state that thrives on multicultural energy, this hub promises to anchor generations to come.



For the first time, Mackay has witnessed Khalsa Sajna Diwas observed with full traditional reverence. The arrival of Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji from Townsville, the chanting of kirtan, and the serving of Guru Ka Langar turned a school hall into a sanctuary of Sikh faith and fellowship. The messages shared—about the turban as a crown of responsibility, and saffron as the colour of sacrifice—remind us that regional Queensland is not a periphery but a powerful stage for cultural continuity. Seva, courage, and identity were the quiet heroes of the day.

Abhilasha Sarmah, a Gold Coast teenager from Somerset College, now holds a national title and a ticket to the Bahamas. But her pageant journey is far from ornamental: she sits on the Gold Coast Junior Council, excels in debating, and is writing a poetry collection titled Love Letters to My Melancholy. In an era when young women are often reduced to gloss, Abhilasha insists on depth. She speaks of pageantry as a platform for leadership and purpose—and that, truly, is worth crowning.

While Abhilasha writes poetry, 13-year-old Arshaan Ameer is writing hope. His debut novel, The Guardians of the Shift: The Coral Quest, wraps climate science in fantasy, sending young Leon Ascanius through an ocean world tethered to the Great Barrier Reef. With a letter from Sir David Attenborough and a documentary record already behind him, Arshaan dreams of school curricula and library shelves. In an age of eco-anxiety, his message is radical: not fear, but action. Queensland should be listening.

The government's safety drive, outlined across seven fronts, is neither silent nor subtle. From 1,600 new police and the State Flying Squad to Jack's Law wanding and Daniel's Law online register, the message is clear: repeat offending will be met with weight. The 7.2 per cent drop in victim numbers and 17 per cent fall in serious repeat offenders are promising. But the editorial test lies in balance. Alongside 'Adult Crime, Adult Time', the $560 million commitment to early intervention—programmes like Regional Reset and Staying on Track—may prove the quieter, longer game. Policing arrests criminals; mentoring, done well, can prevent one from being made. Queensland will watch both paths.

Wishing our readers across Queensland a month of safe gatherings, proud storytelling, and the quiet courage to build community wherever you call home.

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

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Community leaders, elected representatives and members of the Federation of Indian Communities of Queensland at the foundation stone unveiling for the House of India Community and Cultural Centre in Augustine Heights, Greater Springfield, on 19 April 2026. Photo supplied

Foundation stone laid for House of India cultural centre in Queensland

NICK ATTAM *BRISBANE*
@the_indian_sun

The Federation of Indian Communities of Queensland (FICQ) has marked the start of construction for the House of India Community and Cultural Centre at Augustine Heights in Greater Springfield, with a foundation stone ceremony attended by political leaders, community representatives and members of the multicultural sector.

The event brought together federal, state and local representatives alongside faith leaders and community groups to formally launch the project, which is positioned as a major cultural hub for Indian Australians in Queensland.

FICQ President Dr Preethi Suraj said the project had been 〈TURN TO #10〉

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<CONTINUED FROM #8> years in the making and would play a central role in strengthening community ties. “Today marks a proud and historic moment for our community. The House of India is not just a building—it is a symbol of identity, unity, and belonging. It will be a place where generations come together to celebrate culture, build connections, and strengthen the multicultural fabric of Queensland.”

Proceedings opened with a Welcome and Acknowledgement of Country, followed by addresses outlining the vision for the centre. A multifaith blessing formed a key part of the ceremony, with faith leaders offering prayers and sacred soil rituals to reflect unity across cultures.

Federal MPs Julian Hill and Shayne Neumann attended, alongside state MP Hermann Vorster, opposition figures Cameron Dick and Charis Mullen, and Margie Nightingale. They were joined by Ipswich Mayor Teresa Harding and Councillor Pye Augustine.

During the ceremony,Julian Hill MP pointed to federal **<TURN TO #11>**

<CONTINUED FROM #10> backing for the project, noting a $5.5 million funding commitment and acknowledging Shayne Neumann's role in supporting the investment.

Business leader Maha Sinnathamby, founder of Springfield City Group, was also present, with organisers recognising his contribution, including the provision of land for the development. Indian Consulate representative Sushil Kumar Goel and other community leaders attended.

The unveiling of the foundation stone marked the formal start of construction. Organisers said the completed centre would host arts, cultural programs, education initiatives and community services, while supporting engagement across Queensland's diverse population.

FICQ Treasurer Mrs Parul Mehta closed the ceremony with a vote of thanks, followed by community networking.

The organisation acknowledged the support of government partners, volunteers and community stakeholders involved in bringing the project to this stage.

Palani Thevar says volunteering offers one of the strongest returns a person can make, with even small acts of service helping build stronger communities

Mackay marks Khalsa Sajna Diwas with first full-scale Vaisakhi celebration

OUR REPORTER *BRISBANE*
@the_indian_sun

Khalsa Sajna Diwas, widely observed as Vaisakhi, was marked in Mackay with a day-long community gathering at Northview State School in Mount Pleasant, bringing together families to commemorate the founding of the Khalsa Panth by Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji.

The event began **TURN TO #13**

The occasion commemorates the historic moment when Guru Gobind Singh Ji established the Khalsa and initiated the Panj Pyare











<CONTINUED FROM #12> at 10am and featured the ceremonial arrival of Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji from Townsville Gurdwara Sahib, followed by kirtan, or devotional hymns, and traditional religious observances. Organisers described the gathering as the first time the festival had been held in Mackay with full traditional practices.

The occasion commemorates the historic moment when Guru Gobind Singh Ji established the Khalsa and initiated the Panj Pyare, or the Five Beloved Ones, before receiving Amrit from them, a moment that laid the foundation for values centred on equality, courage and faith.

Free entry was offered to attendees, and Guru Ka Langar, a communal meal, was served throughout the day. Families from across the region attended, reflecting the growing Sikh presence in regional Queensland and the role of Vaisakhi celebrations in strengthening community ties.

A message shared during the event reflected on the significance of the dastaar, or turban, describing it as "not just as an article of faith, but as a crown of responsibility, identity, and unwavering commitment to truth." It added that "tying the turban each day is a conscious act of discipline and pride — a reminder that we walk the path laid by the Khalsa, guided by courage, humility, and seva."

The message also explained the symbolism of colours associated with the Khalsa, stating that "the vibrant Kesri (saffron) colour reflects sacrifice, bravery, and the spirit to stand against injustice, no matter the cost," while "the deep blue represents resilience, sovereignty, and fearless strength — a connection to the warrior spirit of the Khalsa."

Reflecting on the meaning of the day, the message encouraged participants to treat the act of wearing the turban as "a moment of reflection: to live with integrity, to protect the weak, and to uphold the values gifted to us," adding that "the dastaar is our identity — wear it with pride, honour it with actions, and let it inspire others through your character."



Abhilasha Sarmah, a Somerset College student from the Gold Coast, has been crowned Miss Teen Galaxy Australia 2026 and will represent Australia at the international finals in the Bahamas, following her win at the Australia Galaxy Pageants. Photo supplied

Gold Coast student Abhilasha Sarmah wins Miss Teen Galaxy Australia 2026

***NICK ATTAM** BRISBANE*
@the_indian_sun

Gold Coast teenager **Abhilasha Sarmah** has been crowned Miss Teen Galaxy Australia 2026, securing a place to represent the country at the international finals in the Bahamas.

The Year 10 student at Somerset College received the title at the Australia Galaxy Pageants, marking a step forward in her pageant journey and opening the door to global competition.

Abhilasha balances her studies with a range of activities including debating, public speaking and the arts. She is also a member of the Gold Coast Junior Council, where she focuses on youth leadership and community engagement.

She said the experience has helped shape her personal development. "Australia Galaxy Pageants has been instrumental in shaping my growth," Abhilasha said. "It has given me the confidence to lead, the courage to speak, and the purpose to make a difference."

Abhilasha has described pageantry as a platform for self-expression and advocacy. Her involvement has supported her efforts to encourage young people to build confidence and pursue their goals.

Alongside her academic and extracurricular work, she is writing a poetry collection titled "Love Letters to My Melancholy", which is expected to be published in the near future.

The 2026 Australia Galaxy Pageants titleholders include Junior Miss Galaxy Australia Alexis, Miss Teen Galaxy Australia Abhilasha, Miss Galaxy Australia Cleo, Ms. Galaxy Australia Haley and Mrs. Galaxy Australia Charlotte.

Abhilasha will now prepare for the international finals, where she is set to represent Australia on a global stage while continuing her focus on youth leadership and creative pursuits.

13-yr-old turns Great Barrier Reef fears into climate book

OUR REPORTER
@the_indian_sun



A 13-year-old student from the Gold Coast is set to release his first book, combining fantasy storytelling with climate awareness and marine conservation themes aimed at young readers across Australia and beyond.

Arshaan Ameer, a student at The Southport School, will launch The Guardians of the Shift: The Coral Quest, a middle-grade eco-adventure designed for readers aged 8 to 14. The book follows the journey of Leon Ascanius through an ocean-based fantasy world connected to the Great Barrier Reef, with a focus on environmental awareness and climate change.

Arshaan said the project is intended to present climate issues in a constructive way. "I want to spread hope, not fear, about climate change," he said. "My book is designed to inspire young readers to take action and understand the importance of marine conservation and environmental awareness."

The release adds to a growing profile for the young author, who has previously worked as a filmmaker and environmental advocate. His documentary Generation Green has drawn attention for its focus on climate change and earned him a certificate from the Australian Book of Records, recognising him among the youngest documentary writers and directors in the country.

Arshaan has also received a personal letter from Sir David Attenborough, acknowledging his work and the broader importance of raising awareness on climate issues among younger audiences.

The book is positioned to engage families, educators and schools, with the author expressing a longer-term goal for its reach. "I dream of a day when this book finds its place in every library and becomes a part of the Australian school curriculum," he said. "I believe that through storytelling, we can ignite a passion for environmental stewardship in young minds, empowering them to become the guardians of our planet's future."

The book will be available globally through major retailers including Amazon, with early interest building around its combination of fantasy narrative and environmental themes linked to the Great Barrier Reef and climate education.

Arshaan continues to share his work through digital platforms, where he focuses on storytelling, filmmaking and environmental advocacy. His latest project places him among a small group of young Australian voices using creative media to address climate change and sustainability.



Constable Chvenne Koki-Collier (centre) with her graduating cohort

Restoring safety where you live

OUR REPORTER *BRISBANE*
@the_indian_sun

The new Queensland Government is **Making Queensland Safer** with more police and stronger laws combined with early intervention and rehabilitation programs for at-risk youth.

Already delivering a 7.2 per cent reduction in victim numbers* and with serious repeat offenders down 17 per cent**, the Government is breaking the cycle of crime. But there's more to be done.

Under Adult Crime, Adult Time almost 4700 youth offenders have been charged with more than 22,800 offences. Youth bail monitoring laws are also stronger, improving safety where you live.

More than 1600 new police are restoring safety where you live.

Bolstered police capability includes an expanded POLAIR (police aerial operations) and the largest rapid response unit in Queensland's history. The State Flying Squad is providing surge capacity straight into crime hotspots—moving fast to target and remove criminals from the street.

Crime hotspots are being targeted through locally led and centrally coordinated police operations. Operation Xray Steeler recently resulted in 1300 people charged with 4072 offences. Operation Forge is underway across the state delivering a highly visible six-month crackdown on break-ins, robberies and stolen cars.

Jack's Law is keeping our streets safer, with police scanning for, detecting and removing weapons to combat knife crime.

The Government is also better protecting children by strengthening the blue card system and delivering Daniel's Law—which provides access to vital information for parents, guardians and members of the community to help safeguard children.

More information is available at DanielsLaw.qld.gov.au

Significant investment in early intervention and rehabilitation programs is breaking the cycle of crime by helping at-risk youth re-engage with education and their communities.

1 FRONTLINE POLICING REBUILT WITH 1,600 ADDITIONAL POLICE

Frontline policing is being rebuilt with more than 1600 new police recruits as part of the plan to make Queensland safer.

Following the March graduation of 61 police officers from the Queensland Police Academy in Oxley, a total of 1625 new police recruits have been delivered in less than 18 months.

These officers are ready to support their communities with integrity, respect and courage in communities across the State, including Brisbane, Cairns, Mount Isa, Townsville, Mackay, the Sunshine Coast, Wide Bay and the Gold Coast.

A career with the Queensland Police Service (QPS) offers diverse roles, unique challenges and the chance to make a real difference every day.

More than 1600 police are restoring safety where you live

From emergency response and crime prevention to community engagement and public safety, no two days are ever the same.

Gold Coast volunteer Surf Lifesaver, Constable Sophie Christie, deployed to the South Brisbane District, said she felt it was an obvious career move to go from the boat to the beat.

"I wanted to continue to help people and I wanted my work to have a meaningful impact to Queensland," Constable Christie said.

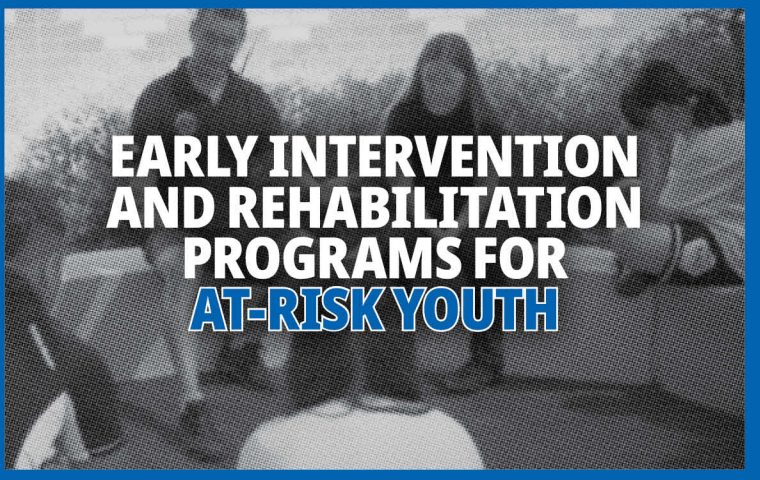
*compared to 2024 (Jan to Dec) per capita **Compared to 2024 serious repeat youth offenders

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*Compared to 2024 (Jan to Dec), per capita. ^Compared to 2024 serious repeat youth offenders.

Making QLD Safer

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Authorised by the Queensland Government, Brisbane.

"Policing ticked all of those boxes for me; I just can't wait to get out there and make a difference in people's lives."

Former school chaplain Noah Langley, now stationed at Tully Police Station, is part of the growing local capability in the Far North.

"It's my people, it's my home. I couldn't imagine serving any other place than Queensland," he said.

Constable Chyenne Koki-Collier joined the service to help others.

"The people who have helped me along the way in my life really motivated me to try and help others," she said.

For more information visit policerecruit.qld.gov.au

OPERATION FORGE RESTORING SAFETY WHERE YOU LIVE

A six-month locally led and centrally coordinated operation targeting break-ins, robberies and stolen cars is underway across the state.

Operation Forge combines specialist personnel from POLAIR (Police Aerial Operations), the State Flying Squad, Youth Co-Responder and Public Safety Response Safety

Authorised by the Queensland Government

DELIVERING FOR QUEENSLAND | Queensland Government



POLAIR in action. Image credit Kana Photography

Recommended by the Queensland Government's Expert Legal Panel, the new laws deliver strengthened youth crime laws and put the rights of victims first

Team with local police.

In the first six weeks, more than 2000 offenders have been charged with over 5000 offences.

QPS Deputy Commissioner Regional Operations, John Tims, said communities would see more highly visible proactive patrols to reduce crime.

"Bolstered by coordinated investigations and shared intelligence, the operation will target prolific, high harm repeat offenders," he said.

"Responses will be tailored for local issues and have the flexibility to strategically shift gears to target high-crime and high-harm locations."

Officer in Charge of POLAIR Senior Sergeant Tony Lawliss said the extension of POLAIR's aerial crime-fighting capability in Cairns and the expansion of that capability on the Sunshine Coast to include the Moreton Bay region had bolstered their ability to support on-ground crews in responding to emergencies.

"Our highly trained crews can respond to incidents faster now that they've been strategically positioned out of more regional bases across Queensland," he said.

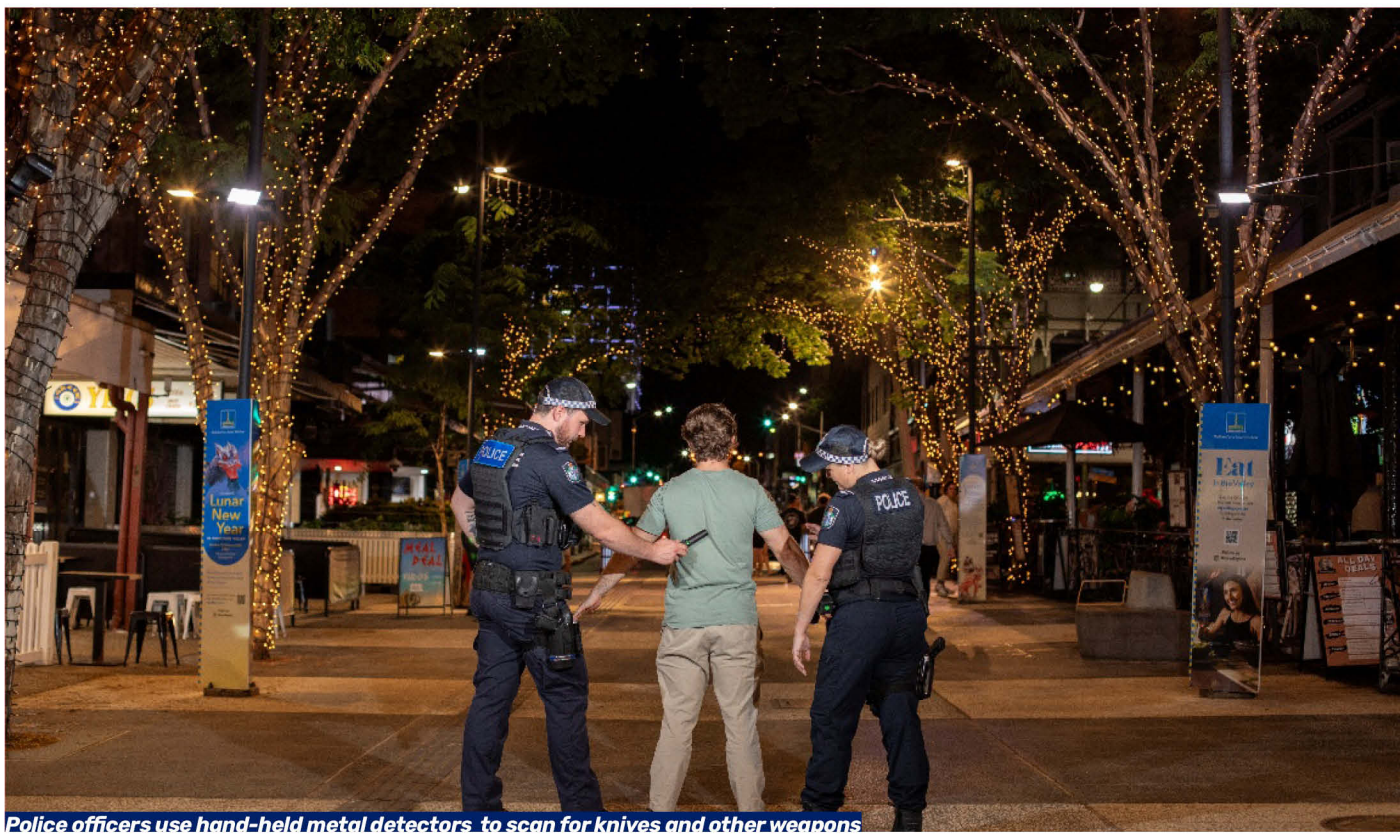
FLYING SQUAD DELIVERS SAFER STREETS FOR QUEENSLANDERS

Built to quickly target and remove dangerous criminals from the streets, the State Flying Squad has clocked up more than 140 deployments to make Queensland safer since its launch in January 2025.

The largest police rapid response unit in Queensland's history is restoring safety where you live, so far arresting 2372 offenders, including 1318 youths, on 7249 charges.

The unit has been deployed to fight crime in locations including the Far North, Townsville and Darling Downs districts.

Senior Constable Samuel Wendt,



Police officers use hand-held metal detectors to scan for knives and other weapons

DELIVERING FOR QUEENSLAND | Queensland Government

Authorised by the Queensland Government

an officer with the State Flying Squad says their work strengthens existing police activities by providing surge capacity into local crime hotspots.

"We enhance their ability to conduct operations by boosting their numbers on the frontlines, which increases community safety," he said.

"Recently, we have been regularly deployed to assist with operations that aim to reduce property crime in Northern and Far Northern Queensland, which resulted in reduced numbers of victims of crime."

❹ JACK'S LAW MAKES IMPACT ACROSS THE STATE

Jack's Law is helping make Queensland safer by enabling police to use handheld metal detectors to find knives and other weapons without a warrant.

Since the laws were made permanent and expanded statewide in July last year, more than 127,000 scans have been carried out, leading to 1947 arrests and 3773 charges.



State flying squad

A six-month operation is targeting break-ins, robberies and stolen cars across the state

Brett and Belinda Beasley lost their 17-year-old son, Jack, in December 2019 at Surfers Paradise when he was fatally stabbed during a night out with friends.

Today, they are proud to see Jack's legacy drive real change, with every wanding operation helping police remove weapons from the streets.

"We don't want any other family to go through what we've been through," Mr Beasley said.

❺ ADULT CRIME, ADULT TIME EXPANDS

Protecting communities, reducing reoffending and holding young offenders to account, underpins ongoing efforts to strengthen youth crime laws. New legislation passed in State Parliament expands Adult Crime, Adult Time to include 12 additional offences, such as aggravated assault occasioning bodily harm, further bolstering efforts to make Queensland safer.

So far, almost 4700 youth offenders have been charged with more than 22,800 Adult Crime, Adult Time offences, contributing to a 7.2 per cent year on year drop in crime victims.

Recommended by the Queensland Government's Expert Legal Panel, these laws aim to deliver tougher measures on youth crime to protect the community.

The decisive reforms, along with early intervention and rehabilitation programs, send a clear message that youth offenders will face serious consequences for their actions.

❻ DANIEL'S LAW: TURNING A LEGACY INTO SAFER COMMUNITIES FOR QUEENSLAND'S CHILDREN

Daniel's Law is one of the most significant reforms to child safety legislation in Queensland's history and is a major milestone in restoring safety where you live.

With more than 290,000 visits to the Daniel's Law website since 31 December 2025, the State's first public sex offender register provides parents an extra tool to keep their families safe.

The online register provides eligible members of the Queensland community access to information about convicted sex offenders who are on Queensland's Child Protection Register , helping communities stay alert and informed.

The register honours the legacy of Sunshine Coast schoolboy Daniel Morcombe, whose abduction and murder in 2003 inspired two decades of advocacy for stronger child protection laws.

"It has been more than 20 years since Daniel was taken from us, and every single day since, we've fought to make sure no other family goes through what we did," parents Bruce and Denise Morcombe shared.

"Daniel's Law is about protecting kids, empowering parents, and shining a light on those who lurk in the dark."

QPS Detective Acting Chief Superintendent Denzil Clark said Daniel's Law will help families better understand local risks and take informed precautions.

"Daniel's Law provides parents, guardians and the broader community with access to information that helps safeguard children," he said.

Visit DanielsLaw.qld.gov.au

❼ BREAKING THE CYCLE: EARLY INTERVENTION TO PREVENT REOFFENDING AND MAKE QUEENSLAND SAFER

The new Queensland Government is delivering targeted early intervention programs that support at-risk young people, increase accountability and reduce reoffending.

The *Regional Reset* program intervenes when young people start to disengage or show signs of antisocial behaviour. It combines mentoring, outdoor challenges and cultural learning to build skills and confidence to make safer choices and avoid trouble.

When a young person leaves detention, the *Staying on Track* program steps in immediately with six months of intensive support to reduce the risk of reoffending. The program connects youths with mentoring, family support and practical life skills training to build routines and stay on a positive path.

The Government is also strengthening local crime prevention by backing community-led projects through *Kickstarter Grants* and expanding school-based support—opening four new Crime Prevention Schools and two Youth Justice Schools.

To ensure the longevity of early intervention and youth justice programs, the Queensland Government is investing $560 million in early intervention and youth justice programs, including $225 million over five years to deliver *Staying on Track*.

In South East Queensland, the Isurava Program, part of the Regional Reset initiative, is helping young people turn their lives around.

Angie Debnam, CEO of the Kokoda Youth Foundation, says taking young people out of their usual environment is one of the most beneficial aspects of the program.

"When young people realise they can make a change and take ownership of their future, that's incredibly powerful."

For youth leaving detention, the *Staying on Track* program, delivered by Life Without Barriers, provides 12 months of support to reduce reoffending.

"The biggest difference is the long-term support," Regional Director Sarah Mahony said.

"We've seen young people rebuild relationships with their parents, return home, and even walk away from crime."

Authorised by the Queensland Government

DELIVERING FOR QUEENSLAND | Queensland Government



Australian Tamil Sangam // Photo supplied

ACT calls for nominations as Youth Week spotlights young changemakers

OUR REPORTER
@the_indian_sun

Canberra is encouraging nominations for the **ACT Women's Awards** during ACT Youth Week, with past recipients highlighted to show the impact young people are making across the community.

Among them is Anjali Sharma, who was previously named ACT Young Woman of the Year after helping drive national climate change protests as a teenager and contributing to policy discussions, including the Climate Change Amendment (Duty of Care and Intergenerational Equity) Bill.

"While awards are never the purpose of activism, it's a sign that what we're doing is working which is an honour and a privilege," Sharma said.

> While awards are never the purpose of activism, it's a sign that what we're doing is working which is an honour and a privilege
>
> **ANJALI SHARMA**

The ACT Women's Awards recognise women, gender-diverse and non-binary people across the region whose work is creating lasting and positive change. The program spans fields including science, sport, community work and culture, with recipients acknowledged for contributions at local, national and global levels.

The ACT Women's Honour Roll continues to record those contributions, listing award recipients since self-government in 1988 across categories such as ACT Women's Awards, ACT Australian of the Year Awards and Canberra Citizen of the Year Awards.

Recent award cycles have recognised a broad group of contributors. Lauren Cannell was named ACT Woman of the Year, while Jayanti Gupta received ACT Senior Woman of the Year. Megan Gilmour was recognised as ACT Australian of the Year, with Vanessa Brettell and Hannah Costello named ACT Local Heroes.

Officials say nominations are open to women, gender-diverse and non-binary people from all backgrounds and life experiences, with individuals able to nominate themselves or others.

The next ACT Women's Awards ceremony is scheduled for 3 September 2026, when new recipients and Honour Roll inductees will be announced. Organisers say ACT Youth Week provides an opportunity to recognise emerging leaders and encourage wider community participation in the nomination process.

For more information, visit ***act.gov.au***

"Nama Mahima" discourse inspires Brisbane community

NICK ATTAM
𝕏 **@the_indian_sun**



The Brisbane Indian community experienced an enriching spiritual gathering as **Samavedham Shanmukha Sarma** delivered discourses on the significance of **"Nama Mahima"** over two days, held on the 12th and 13th.

Sarma is a well-known Indian spiritual teacher, scholar and orator recognised for his discourses on Hindu scriptures, including the Puranas, Vedas and Itihasas. He serves as the editor of Rushipeetham magazine, is a devotional lyricist associated with Sivapadam, and founded the Rushividyabhyasam initiative, which focuses on preserving and promoting Indian cultural and spiritual traditions. More information about his work can be found at Rushipeetham.





The event drew a large and engaged audience, with attendees responding warmly to the pravachanams that explored the value of chanting the divine name in daily life. Through storytelling, scriptural references and practical reflections, Sarma highlighted how Nama Smarana can support a sense of calm, clarity and spiritual focus.

The programme was organised by Challa Prasad and coordinated by Sree Krishna Venuthurupalli along with Suresh Ajjarapu. Their efforts helped ensure the event ran smoothly and created a welcoming setting for participants.

Across both days, families, young people and older attendees took part, reflecting steady interest in spiritual learning within the local community. The sessions connected traditional teachings with present-day concerns, which appeared to resonate with younger attendees looking for balance in a busy routine.

The programme closed with a shared meal, giving participants time to reflect and connect. Organisers thanked the community for its support and participation, noting the strong turnout and engagement across both days.

More info: ***rushipeetham.com***

> Through story-telling, scriptural references and practical reflections, Sarma highlighted how Nama Smarana can support a sense of calm, clarity and spiritual focus

From bedside care to Ben & Jerry's: Jai Singh's sweet new chapter

INDIRA LAISRAM
@indira_laisram

When **Jai Singh** arrived in Australia from Amritsar in 2019, he had $2,000 in his bank account and no connections—just a spot in Western Sydney University's Bachelor of Nursing program.

Six years later, the 25-year-old Indian immigrant is preparing to open what he says is South Australia's first independent **Ben & Jerry's Scoop Shop**, at Shop 3, 62 Hindley Street, Adelaide. He is also one of the youngest Ben & Jerry's owners in Australia.

"I can't believe it," he says. "I think I can bring a young touch to the brand."

Before ice cream, there was nursing.

After completing his degree, Singh moved to rural South Australia when an opportunity came up in Murray Bridge. "I said, why not?". He fell in love with the small-town rhythm of quiet streets, familiar faces, and the easy warmth of strangers. He never went back to Sydney.

For three years, he worked in aged care and palliative care, often sitting with people in their final days and supporting their families. "Almost every person I met had regrets," he says. "Not a single person said, 'I fulfilled everything in my life.' I didn't want to become that person."

The work was meaningful, but emotionally heavy. "When the first person died in front of me, I cried more than the family," he says. "I was like, this is so painful."

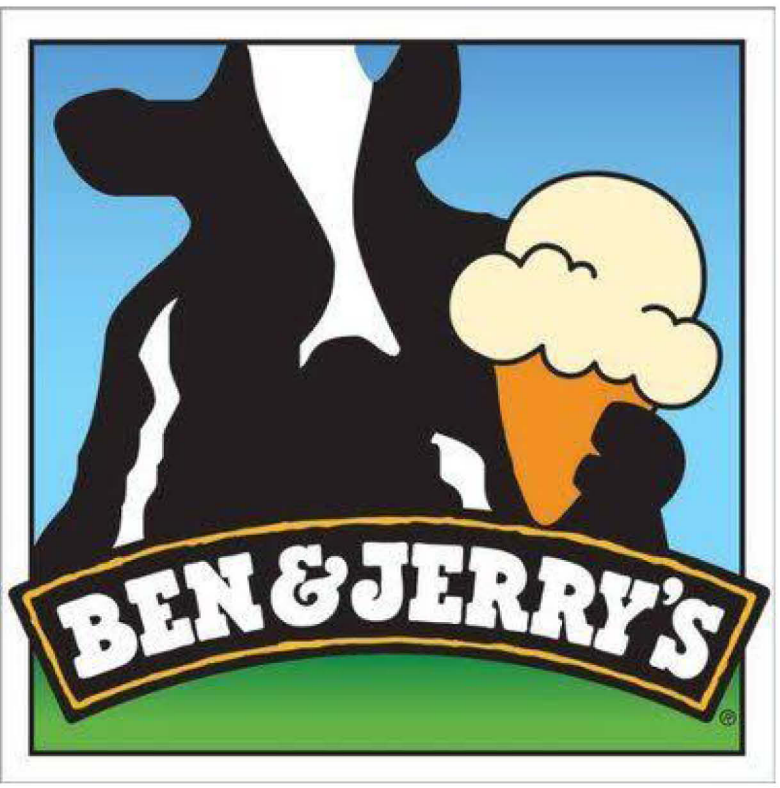
He also witnessed deep loneliness. "You won't believe how many people die without anyone around them. Sometimes I was the only one there."

The turning point came during a night shift in Wallaroo. A planned blackout left the small rural town in darkness, and Singh stepped outside under a sky full of stars. "I suddenly thought you love what you do, but do you want to do this for your whole life?"

He thought of his childhood in Punjab, where weekend ice cream trips were small but memorable family rituals. "I have such an emotional connection with ice cream. I wanted to create that same feeling for people."

That thought led him to Ben & Jerry's. As he googled more about the brand with its focus on social causes, human rights and ethical sourcing, it struck a chord. **<TURN TO #25>**





> "I have such an emotional connection with ice cream. I wanted to create that same feeling for people. (Ben & Jerry's) aligned with me
>
> **JAI SINGH**


BEN & JERRY'S
ADELAIDE
we're opening on
FREE CONE DAY
JOIN US FOR A FREE SCOOP ON 5 MAY
62 Hindley St, Adelaide



CONTINUED FROM #23 "It aligned with me. They sell ice cream, but they also care about people."

The leap, however, was far from easy. His parents were worried. "You are 22," they told him. "You don't know anything. How will you do this?"

By then, Singh had saved about $100,000 through years of long shifts and careful spending. But the total cost of the franchise ran into several hundred thousand dollars, which meant taking on a bank loan.

"In Indian families, taking on that kind of debt is scary," he says. "But sometimes you have to take that risk to build something."

He went through multiple rounds of interviews, with the final one conducted by the CEO of Ben & Jerry's Australia and New Zealand.

"He said, 'Jai, you look like a good fit.'"

Singh left nursing about six weeks ago to focus entirely on the business. He has hired 12 staff from diverse backgrounds and wants the shop to feel less like a workplace and more like a shared space.

Opening day is set for Monday, 5 May, from 12pm to 8pm, with unlimited free scoops to mark Ben & Jerry's Free Cone Day.

The choice of Hindley Street is deliberate. Known for its nightlife and, more recently, its decline, it is not the obvious location for a family-friendly ice cream shop.

"People say it's dying off," Singh says. "I think Ben & Jerry's can bring some life back."

It is a gamble—one he is fully aware of.

> In Indian families, taking on that kind of debt is scary. But sometimes you have to take that risk to build something
>
> **JAI SINGH**

"I am putting my whole life savings into this. It can go either way. But I'll make it work."

Nursing, he insists, will always remain a part of him. "I can never separate myself from it."

But for now, he is choosing to act on what he learned at the bedside—not to wait.

"If I can do it, anyone can do it," he says. "If you come to a country and don't know anyone, you can still build something."





Indians become Australia's largest overseas-born group, ABS data shows

OUR REPORTER
@the_indian_sun

People born in India have become the largest overseas-born population in Australia for the first time, narrowly overtaking those born in England, according to figures released on 29 April by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

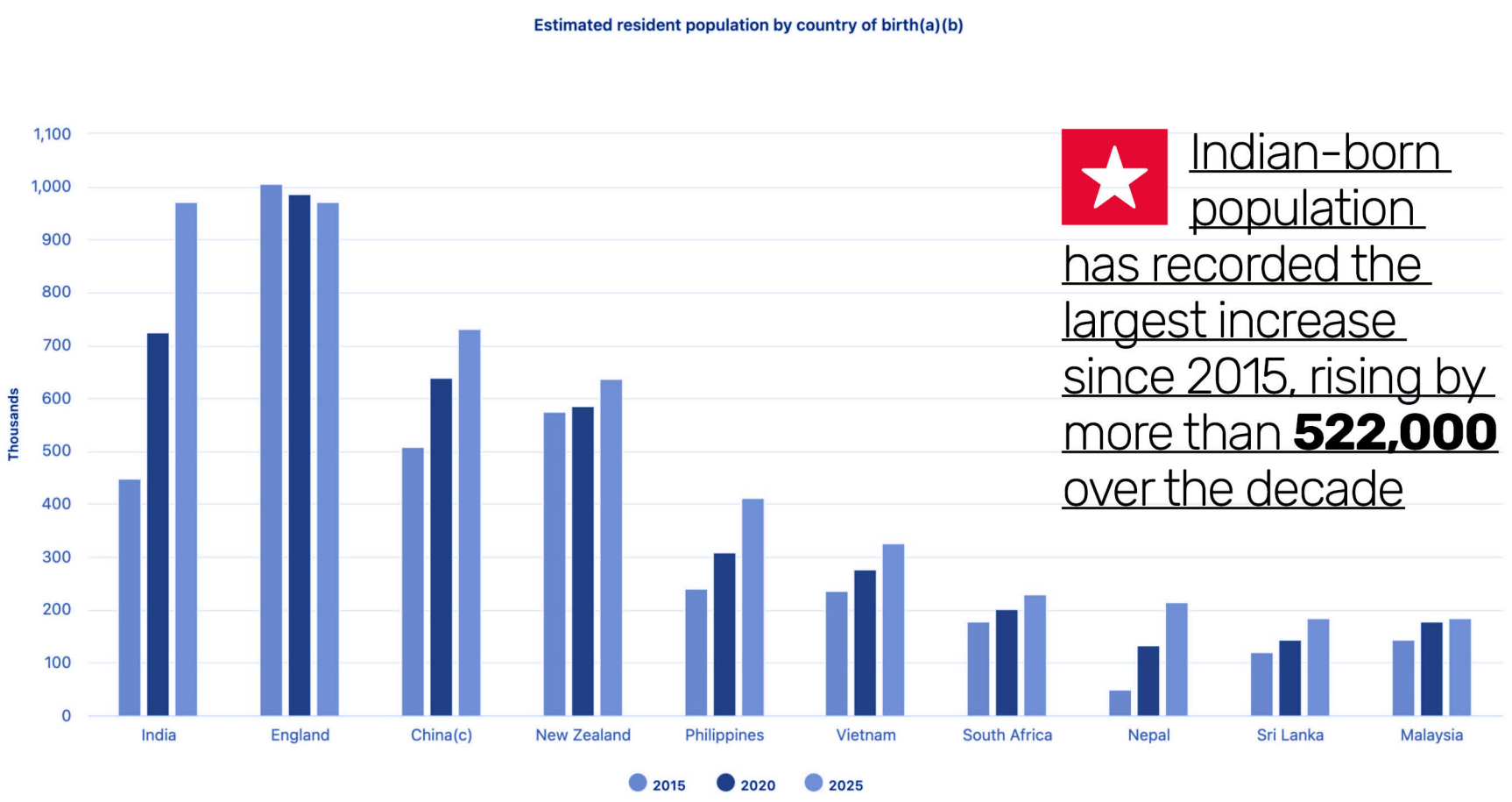
The ABS estimates 971,020 Indian-born residents were living in Australia as at 30 June 2025, compared with 970,950 people born in England.

A year earlier, England retained a clear lead, with 963,560 residents compared with 916,330 Indian-born people. The shift reflects sustained growth in migration from India alongside a gradual decline in the number of England-born residents.

The data shows the Indian-born population has recorded the largest increase since 2015, rising by more than 522,000 over the decade. By contrast, the number of people born in England has fallen over the same period, down by around 36,000.

ABS historical records indicate England had **<TURN TO #27>**

The ABS said populations born in Italy and England have recorded the **largest declines** since 2015, with both groups now having median ages above 60



Indian-born population has recorded the largest increase since 2015, rising by more than **522,000** over the decade

a. Population estimates for 2025 are preliminary. See Revision status in the methodology page.
b. Top 10 countries of birth for Australia's estimated resident population as at 30 June 2025 (excludes Australia).
c. Excludes SARs and Taiwan.

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Australia's population by country of birth Jun 2025

❮CONTINUED FROM #26❯

consistently been the largest overseas-born group in Australia since at least 1901. That pattern has now changed, with India taking the top position after several years of steady growth.

China remains the third largest overseas-born group, with an estimated 731,540 residents, followed by New Zealand at 637,680. Other large migrant communities include those from the Philippines, Vietnam, South Africa, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Malaysia.

Australia's total population was estimated at 27.6 million in mid-2025, including 18.8 million people born in the country and 8.8 million born overseas. Overseas-born residents accounted for about 32 per cent of the population, approaching the historical peak of 32.4 per cent recorded in 1891.

Over the past two decades, the overseas-born population has grown at an average annual rate of 3.0 per cent, compared with 1.0 per cent for those born in Australia. This faster growth has driven the rising share of migrants in the overall population.

"The median age of those born overseas has fluctuated over time, peaking at a median of 46 years in 2002 and decreasing to 44 years in 2019," the ABS said in its release on Wednesday.

"In 2021, due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the decrease in younger people (such as international students) migrating to Australia, the median age of the overseas-born population increased to 45 years."



Representational Photo by Mitchell Luo on Unsplash

China remains the third largest overseas-born group, with an estimated 731,540 residents, followed by New Zealand at 637,680. Other large migrant communities include those from the Philippines, Vietnam, South Africa, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Malaysia

By 2025, the median age for overseas-born residents stood at 43, slightly lower than 46 in 2005. The median age for Australian-born residents was 35, up from 33 two decades earlier.

The ABS said populations born in Italy and England have recorded the largest declines since 2015, with both groups now having median ages above 60. This reflects post-war migration patterns, when large numbers arrived from Europe and have since aged.

Migration trends shifted during the pandemic, when travel restrictions reduced overseas arrivals and temporarily lowered the share of migrants in the population. Since restrictions eased in 2022, migration levels have increased again, pushing the overseas-born share back above 30 per cent.

Australia ranks eighth globally for the number of overseas-born residents. The United States remains the largest host country, with 52.4 million migrants making up 15 per cent of its population. Germany follows with 16.8 million migrants, or 19.8 per cent of its population, while Saudi Arabia ranks third with 13.7 million migrants, accounting for 31.5 per cent.

New Zealand-born residents remain the fourth largest overseas-born group in Australia, representing 2.3 per cent of the population.



Evan Mulholland attends the Australian Sikh Games 2026 in Melbourne, celebrating strong community spirit and a well-run event by organisers. Photo/Facebook

Sikh Games draw 100,000 as Melbourne hosts 38th edition

OUR REPORTER
@the_indian_sun

Melbourne hosted the **38th Australian Sikh Games** earlier this month, drawing large crowds and reinforcing the event's place as one of the country's biggest community-led sporting gatherings.

Held from 3 to 5 April in Parkville, the Games brought together more than 8,000 athletes and performers competing across 15 sports and cultural activities. Organisers estimate that over 100,000 people attended across the three days, with participation from around 120 not-for-profit sporting and cultural clubs.

Athletes and spectators travelled from **<TURN TO #29>**



Among those attending were Liberal figures including Jess Wilson, Evan Mulholland and Matthew Guy, who joined participants and spectators





«CONTINUED FROM #28» across Australia and overseas, including New Zealand, Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Canada and the United Kingdom, reflecting the event's expanding reach.

Crowds turned out in force throughout the programme, which combined competitive fixtures with cultural showcases. Kabaddi remained a major draw, alongside athletics and team sports, while music, food and performances added to a festival-like atmosphere around the venues.

Among those attending were Liberal figures including Jess Wilson, Evan Mulholland and Matthew Guy, who joined participants and spectators during the event.

Organisers, led by committee member Jag Chugha, were credited with delivering a well-coordinated programme despite the scale of the event. Volunteers played a central role, supporting logistics, scheduling, safety and venue operations across multiple sites.

The Australian Sikh Games, first held in 1988, rotate between major cities and regional centres each year. They have grown steadily in scale, evolving into a national platform that blends sport with cultural connection and community engagement.

> Kabaddi remained a major draw, alongside athletics and team sports, with food, music

That growth mirrors broader demographic trends. Data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics shows Sikhism is among the fastest-growing religions in the country, with more than 210,000 people identifying as Sikh in the 2021 Census, up from around 125,000 in 2016. Victoria accounts for a significant share, with Melbourne now a key centre for Sikh community life.

Organisers say interest in future editions remains strong, with plans to build on participation levels while maintaining the volunteer-driven structure that underpins the Games.





पारिवारिक और घरेलू हिंसा के दीर्घकालिक असर को उजागर करने के लिए कैंडललाइट विजिल

OUR REPORTER
@the_indian_sun

Safe Steps ने वक्टिोरयिा के लोगों से अपील की है कवि 6 मई को आयोजति उसकी वार्षकि कैंडललाइट वजिलि में शामलि होकर पारविारकि और घरेलू हसिा से प्रभावति परविारों के प्रत अपना समर्थन जताएँ।

यह विजिल स्मरण के लिए आयोजित की जाती है, लेकिन इस वर्ष इसका ध्यान पारिवारिक हिंसा के उन अक्सर अनदेखे, दूरगामी प्रभावों पर है जो बच्चों, युवाओं और परिवारों पर लंबे समय तक असर डालते हैं। Safe Steps उन लोगों के अनुभवों पर रोशनी डाल रहा है जो संकट के बाद भी इसके प्रभावों के साथ जी रहे हैं, ताकि इसके व्यापक असर को बेहतर समझा जा सके और इस पर गंभीर चर्चा हो।

2025 में ऑस्ट्रेलिया में 77 महिलाओं और 26 बच्चों की हत्या उनके माता-पिता या अंतरंग साथियों द्वारा की गई (The Red Heart Campaign)। 2026 में अब तक 14 महिलाओं, तीन बच्चों और एक अजन्मे शिशु की मौत घरेलू या संबंधित हिंसा के कारण हो चुकी है (Australian Femicide Watch)।

युवाओं के संदर्भ में, हर 8 में से 1 व्यक्ति ने 15 वर्ष की उम्र से पहले अपने किसी अभिभावक के खिलाफ हिंसा देखी है (Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission), और ऐसे अनुभव जीवन भर के परिणामों को प्रभावित कर सकते हैं। इसके अलावा, बड़े किशोरों में से एक-तिहाई ने अंतरंग साथी हिंसा का अनुभव किया है, जबकि लगभग 39% यौन उत्पीड़न के पीड़ित 10 से 17 वर्ष के बीच के हैं (Australian Institute of Family Studies; Australian Bureau of Statistics)। गहरी समझ के अभाव में, पारिवारिक हिंसा और आघात के प्रभाव अक्सर अनदेखे रह जाते हैं।

2025 में Safe 〈TURN TO #31〉



CONTINUED FROM #30

Steps को हिंदी में 8 और पंजाबी में 9 सहायता अनुरोध प्राप्त हुए, और 40 विभिन्न भाषाओं में अनुवाद सहायता प्रदान की गई।

उसी अवधि में लगभग 154 पीड़ित-उत्तरजीवियों को दुभाषिया सेवाओं की आवश्यकता पड़ी। आपातकालीन आवास (मोटल) में, सांस्कृतिक और भाषाई रुप से विविध पृष्ठभूमि (CALD) के लोग लगातार लगभग 25 प्रतिशत रहे।

हर आंकड़ा उन परिवारों और समुदायों का प्रतिनिधित्व करता है जिनका जीवन स्थायी रुप से बदल गया है। ये प्रभाव अक्सर बच्चों के साथ वयस्कता तक चलते हैं, लेकिन पूरी तरह दर्ज नहीं हो पाते।





Payal Tiwari

Safe Steps की ग्रुप डायरेक्टर Suzanne Paynter ने कहा कि पारिवारिक हिंसा घर छोड़ने के बाद खत्म नहीं होती।

"अक्सर बातचीत तत्काल संकट पर केंद्रित होती है, लेकिन पारिवारिक हिंसा के दीर्घकालिक और पीढ़ीगत प्रभाव को कम समझा जाता है, खासकर उन बच्चों के लिए जो हिंसा, बेघरपन, बाधित शिक्षा, मानसिक आघात और अस्थिरता का सामना करते हैं।"

समर्थन की मांग लगातार बढ़ रही है। Safe Steps ने कॉल में साल-दर-साल 17% की वृद्धि दर्ज की है और वित्तीय वर्ष 2025 में फोन, ईमेल और लाइव चैट के माध्यम से लगभग 1,30,000 संपर्कों का जवाब दिया, साथ ही अदालत सहायता में 83% की वृद्धि देखी गई।

Suzanne Paynter ने कहा, "घरेलू और पारिवारिक हिंसा की व्यापकता के बावजूद, ऐसे बच्चों और युवाओं के लिए अभी भी पर्याप्त समर्थन की कमी है जो इसके बीच बड़े होते हैं।"

"इसके व्यापक और अक्सर अनदेखे प्रभाव होते हैं। यह पीढ़ियों तक जारी रहता है और बच्चों और परिवारों पर गहरा असर डालता है।"

"युवाओं के लिए समर्थन की कमी उन्हें बेघरपन और न्याय प्रणाली में फंसने के अधिक जोखिम में डाल सकती है।"

"किशोरों में आघात से जुड़ा व्यवहार अक्सर 'acting out' समझकर नजरअंदाज कर दिया जाता है, जबकि इसके पीछे की असली वजह पर ध्यान नहीं दिया जाता। घर से भागना या आपराधिक न्याय प्रणाली में पहुंचना अक्सर घर के भीतर की समस्याओं को छिपा देता है। गहरी समझ के बिना, पारिवारिक हिंसा और आघात के प्रभाव अनदेखे रह जाते हैं।"

Safe Steps की रणनीतिक सलाहकार Payal Tiwari इस संगठन के साथ मिलकर जागरूकता बढ़ाने और पीड़ित-उत्तरजीवियों तथा उनके परिवारों को सहायता लेने के लिए प्रोत्साहित कर रही हैं।

एक वरिष्ठ टेक्नोलॉजी और परिवर्तन विशेषज्ञ के रुप में, Payal अब अपने अनुभव का उपयोग बदलाव के लिए कर रही हैं और नीति तथा सेवा सुधार में योगदान दे रही हैं।

"मेरे मामले में, मैं एक नेशनल डायरेक्टर थी, वित्त को समझती थी और एक बिज़नेस यूनिट संभाल रही थी। और फिर भी... घर में हिंसा हो रही थी और मुझे नहीं पता था कि कैसे निकलूं," Payal ने कहा।

"जब मैंने घर छोड़ा, तब भी यह आसान नहीं था। मेरे पास घर था, लेकिन सुरक्षा कारणों से जज ने मुझे वहां रहने की अनुमति नहीं दी। मुझे जाना पड़ा।"

"और 1800RESPECT पर कॉल करने के बाद मुझे Safe Steps से जोड़ा गया। मैंने पहले उनके बारे में सुना भी नहीं था। लेकिन जब मुझे सबसे ज्यादा जरुरत थी, उन्होंने साथ दिया। मेरा बेटा और मैंने लगभग एक महीना संकट आवास में बिताया।"

Payal का अनुभव यह दिखाता है कि घर छोड़ना कहानी का अंत नहीं होता।

"पारिवारिक हिंसा तब खत्म नहीं होती जब आप निकल जाते हैं। मेरे मामले में, इसका मतलब था वर्षों तक कानूनी प्रक्रिया में रहना, 20 से अधिक अदालत सुनवाई। यह थकाने वाला और लगातार चलने वाला अनुभव था। मुझे आर्थिक, मानसिक और शारीरिक रुप से फिर से शुरुआत करनी पड़ी," उन्होंने कहा।

समय के साथ यह अनुभव एक नई दिशा में बदल गया।

"क्योंकि घर छोड़ना अंत नहीं है। यह जीवन को फिर से बनाने की शुरुआत है। जो शुरुआत में सिर्फ बचाव होता है, वह आगे चलकर बेहतर जीवन में बदल सकता है। उस बीच की अवस्था को मैं 'थ्राइवल' कहती हूं।"

"अगर हमें बदलाव चाहिए, तो हमें तीन चीजों पर ध्यान देना होगा: रोकथाम, संकट सहायता और पुनर्वास।"

उनका अनुभव यह भी बताता है कि यह समस्या किसी एक वर्ग तक सीमित नहीं है।

"मेरे पास सुविधाएं थीं। मैं अंग्रेजी बोलती हूं। मैं शिक्षित हूं। मेरे पास टेक करियर था। फिर भी जाना मुश्किल था। तो सोचिए उन लोगों के लिए जिनके पास ये सब नहीं है," Payal ने कहा।

"ताकत संकट से ही पैदा हो, यह ज़रुरी नहीं होना चाहिए।"

Suzanne Paynter ने कहा, "अगर हमें वास्तविक बदलाव चाहिए, तो सबसे पहले हमें बच्चों और युवाओं पर पारिवारिक हिंसा के दीर्घकालिक प्रभाव को पहचानना और उसे संबोधित करना होगा।"

मेलबर्न के प्रमुख भवन, जैसे Melbourne Town Hall, AAMI Park, Old Treasury Building Museum और Myer Melbourne, एक बार फिर एकजुटता के प्रतीक के रुप में बैंगनी रोशनी में जगमगाएंगे। 2025 में इस विजिल में 400 से अधिक लोग शामिल हुए थे और इस वर्ष और अधिक भागीदारी की उम्मीद है।

Safe Steps विक्टोरिया की एकमात्र 24/7 गोपनीय और समावेशी पारिवारिक एवं घरेलू हिंसा सहायता सेवा है, जो उच्च जोखिम स्थितियों में पीड़ित-उत्तरजीवियों को सुरक्षा और निरंतर सहायता प्रदान करती है।

यह कैंडललाइट विजिल पारिवारिक हिंसा के कारण खोए गए लोगों को श्रद्धांजलि देने और बच्चों व युवाओं के लिए बेहतर समर्थन की मांग को आगे बढ़ाने का प्रयास है।

Safe Steps 2026 कैंडललाइट विजिल

तारीख: बुधवार, 6 मई 2026

समय: शाम 6:00 बजे—6:45 बजे

स्थान: Family Violence Memorial Garden, East Melbourne

Safe Steps के बारे में

Safe Steps उन सभी लोगों को तत्काल सहायता प्रदान करता है जो पारिवारिक और घरेलू हिंसा का सामना कर रहे हैं। यह विक्टोरिया में 24/7 सेवाएं उपलब्ध कराता है और हर साल 1,30,000 से अधिक कॉल, ईमेल और वेब चैट संभालता है।

हर साल लगभग 33,000 रातों का आपातकालीन आवास प्रदान किया जाता है, जिनमें से 43% बच्चे और युवा होते हैं।

यदि आप या आपका कोई परिचित पारिवारिक या घरेलू हिंसा का सामना कर रहा है, तो Safe Steps से 24/7 संपर्क करें:

फोन: 1800 015 188

ईमेल: safesteps@safesteps.org.au

वेबसाइट: safesteps.org.au



From gathering to declaration

*Held in Narrm (Melbourne) from April 27 to 30, the **Women Deliver 2026 Conference** brought together more than 6,000 delegates from 189 countries. **Maria Irene** reports*

MARIA IRENE
@ledgerlifeio

The **Women Deliver 2026 Conference** in Narrm (Melbourne), held from April 27 to 30, brought together more than 6,000 delegates from 189 countries, ending with the launch of the Melbourne Declaration for Gender Equality.

Sessions across the four days focused on accountability, funding systems, leadership and the lived realities shaping gender equality. The gathering opened with calls for structural reform and closed with a collective document that organisers say will guide the next phase of action.

Australia's Minister for Women, Senator the Katy Gallagher, set the tone at the opening, pointing to the role of government in embedding reform across sectors.

"We are taking government action, whether it be in workplace relations, access to justice, in economic policy, and in social services, in education, health, and housing," said Senator Gallagher.

She highlighted changes introduced during the Government's first term, including gender-responsive budgeting.

"Women are the backbone of the care economy, yet they were amongst the lowest paid in Australia. This is not right."

Gallagher said transparency and policy changes are driving progress.

"We are closing the gender pay gap, and we now publish the gender pay gaps of large employers and are making them set targets to reach gender equality, and meet them."

She cautioned that progress remains vulnerable to reversal.

"When it comes to gender equality, progress ❮TURN TO #33❯



> Just two days ago, the global military spending report showed it rose by 2.9% to $2.8 trillion. How do we make sense of this enormous figure?
>
> **DR AMRITA KAPUR**



CONTINUED FROM #32 is not linear and progress made today can be unwound back tomorrow. It is achieved when women make the fight for equality impossible to ignore. It is achieved when governments choose to act, to embed and entrench reform that deliver for women, and make our communities and economies stronger for everybody," she said.

Speakers across the opening sessions said global conditions are placing increasing pressure on women and communities, with conflict, economic instability and climate change shaping outcomes unevenly across regions.

YOUTH, SYSTEMS AND PRESSURE POINTS

The early stages of the conference focused on youth leadership and the role of systems in shaping opportunity. A youth-led pre-conference brought participants together ahead of the main programme, setting priorities that carried into broader discussions.

Sessions highlighted a shift in how younger voices are included in decision-making. Rather than being positioned as observers, participants were involved in shaping agendas and identifying key demands.

A leadership discussion featuring former Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, alongside Katie Telford and Leigh Sales, reinforced that direction. The session focused on leadership and inclusion, with emphasis on the role of younger generations in policy formation.

"Being better is not good enough."

Speakers said youth voices have influenced policies on climate action, inclusion and reproductive rights, and are increasingly present within decision-making processes.

Alongside leadership discussions, panels examined structural barriers in global systems, particularly around funding and access. A session titled The Cost: Who Bears the Price of Fiscal Choices brought together Ruth Cross Kwansing, Dr Amrita Kapur, Aapta Garg and Fiana Arbab.

Kwansing said delays in accessing international funding remain a major barrier.

"What do you mean from the international system that you're still not getting more flexibility and greater understanding? Because when you think of what it takes to access these fundings, it generally takes years. If we talk about climate finance mechanisms, it takes years to unlock that funding."

She described how communities can be held back at early stages of funding access.

"I know a visit of islands that are that is stuck in the readiness process, and the readiness process is what actually allows governments to start directly developing these programs or accessing the funding."

Kwansing said current systems tend to prioritise infrastructure over direct community needs.

"So what we need is for those programs to understand that it's not just governments that are solving the issues, because governments solve public issues. And so right now, those financing mechanisms focus on public issues, and what that means is protecting schools or hospitals or roads, but that doesn't protect communities and so, and that's where that's the mechanism that we need to unlock to create that flexibility so that we can solve problems with families directly."

Kapur pointed to global spending priorities as a central issue.

"It's worth taking a moment to look at what this military spending amount means in real terms. Just two days ago, the global military spending report showed it rose by 2.9% to $2.8 trillion. How do we make sense of this enormous figure?"

She said a shift in spending could change outcomes across sectors.

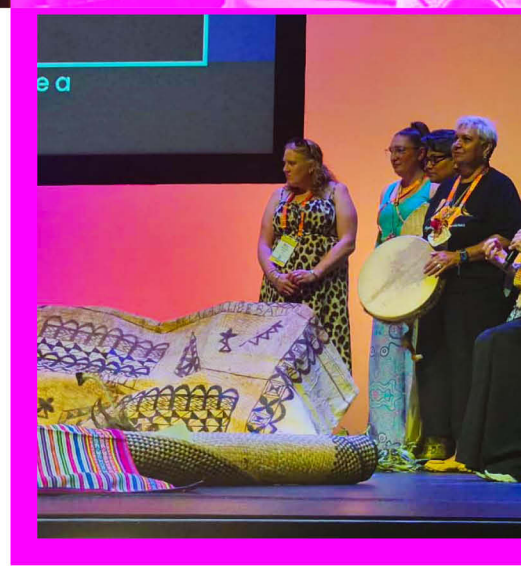
"The five biggest **TURN TO #34**











> The delusions are broken, and people are rising. Revolution is catching fire around the world

FIANA ARBAB

CONTINUED FROM #33 spenders were the US, China, Russia, Germany and India, that accounted for 58% but this amount could fund a decade of universal primary health care the world over."

"If we just had three to four years of that funding, we would be able to cover universal education, universal primary health care, eradicate extreme poverty, and do an entire energy transition."

Arbab said the pressure on lower-income countries is growing.

"3.3 billion people now live in countries that spend more on debt servicing than on health and education, and the most food insecure countries, these are the basics of human life, have seen the highest increases in debt."

She said current conditions are affecting both communities and institutions.

"This cost is not only economic and political. It is also human."

Arbab described the impact of conflict and displacement.

"It displaces mainly, I mean, right now it's the SWANA region under direct attack, and it results in extreme repression of the population in all the neighboring countries."

She added that the effects are now being felt more widely.

"I as an upper middle class woman of the global north, raised in the United States, I'm even feeling the pinch locally."

"I've lost funding for the Michigan student power Alliance, which is a nonprofit that I helped found. It's been 10 years in the making, and now we've had to close operations."

"I've also lost my job in the international development sector, which continues to shrink, and I've had to secure another one."

Arbab said public sentiment is shifting.

"The delusions are broken, and people are rising."

"Revolution is catching fire around the world. I'm talking Nepal, Bangladesh, Philippines, Peru, Madagascar, Morocco."

She called for a shift in how cooperation is approached.

"We need to finance like we are in solidarity. We need to connect like we are in solidarity, and we need to dance together like we are in solidarity."

LEADERSHIP, ACCOUNTABILITY AND THE GLOBAL FRAME

Later sessions returned to questions of leadership and accountability, with global figures examining the role of states and institutions.

Former New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark said responsibility ultimately rests with governments.

"States need to uphold their responsibilities, but then you have the UN of the many organisations which do good work, you know, UN Women, UN Population Fund, fantastic, UNICEF working for children and for girls, UNDP, so many that are doing their best to uphold norms and standards and build a better world."

"So I think the accountability part lies with the Member States, and the Melbourne Declaration goes over and over this, they make commitments, we have to hold them accountable."

United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed pointed to leadership gaps.

"A huge drought in leadership, and perhaps if we had more women leading as we had at the time that Right Honourable Helen Clark was, we would make a difference."

She said representation affects outcomes.

"And it's very real, it's not about just equal numbers of men and women, it's about what we come to deliver. Women deliver differently, and they need to be part of that equation."

Mohammed said global systems reflect the decisions of member states.

"I look there and I see member states, and member states who have a responsibility to hold **TURN TO #35**



CONTINUED FROM #34 peace in the world, and the rule of law and the values and the principles of the Charter are the first to step back from it."

She called for change at the highest levels.

"So I hope that we can push for the first woman Secretary General, I know Right Honourable Helen Clark is in the forefront of advocating for that, and maybe we'll begin to see differences."

She pointed to progress within the UN system.

"What we have been able to do, and I said that today, in the last decade we put 219 women in senior positions of leadership, heading agencies, funds and programs, missions in the field."

Mohammed said targeted approaches remain important.

"Better targeted is what you have to go after. Better targeted is what we have to do for the people who are following."

Sue-Anne Hunter, Australia's inaugural National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People, highlighted structural challenges affecting First Nations communities.

"These systems have not changed. They are created to remove our children from their families so they actually work exactly the way they are intended to do."

Her remarks reflected wider calls for policies shaped by lived experience and community leadership.

♥ FROM DISCUSSION TO DECLARATION

The conference closed with the launch of the Melbourne Declaration for Gender Equality, described as a collective outcome shaped through global consultation.

Women Deliver CEO Maliha Khan said the gathering had created momentum but needed a clear result.

"But we need something solid to take with us. So I am so delighted to say that we have it. We have the Melbourne Declaration for Gender Equality. Well done, everybody."

She said the process behind the declaration reflected collective effort.

"What we have done is we have created ambition, created solidarity, we've created hope. And all of that for a progressive future of gender equality."

The declaration was developed through more than 30 consultations involving over 650 contributors. A drafting committee including Aisha Fahm, Lauren Farris, Laura Cook, Nina Burling and Sandra Roach was acknowledged for its role.

Khan said early support had been strong.

"We already have over 400 endorsements. 400 of you signed up. Almost 50% of those represent more than just 400 because they are organizations. We have almost 200 organizations that have already endorsed and officially signed on to The Declaration."

She said individuals would also be able to endorse the document.

"Remember, if your organization is not quite ready yet, because of the nature of it, you as individuals can sign on to the Declaration."

Ten countries have signed an accompanying state declaration, including Colombia, Mexico, Slovenia, France, the United Kingdom, Norway, Uruguay, Finland, Spain and Canada.

Khan outlined the focus of the declaration.

"It is pledging to work around states and their obligations to public accountability and to the people who live within the state. Create the conditions for the collective voice and of all the movements that allow social justice to fly, to transform our own institutions, to center local priorities and accountability to the people, and to confront unjust economic systems, and to stand against militarism."

She said the guiding principle moving forward is clear.

"What must come first is solidarity."

The name of the declaration was reconsidered following consultation with First Nations communities.

"We did, for a little while, envision that perhaps we'd be able to call it the NARM Declaration… but we had to ask the First Nations who actually owned that name… and they wanted to keep that name for their own work."

The conference brought together 6,123 participants from 189 countries, with strong representation from the Oceanic Pacific region and Asia. Organisers described it as a gathering shaped by shared experience and collective intent.

Attention now turns to how the commitments outlined in the Melbourne Declaration will be implemented, as governments, organisations and communities carry the work forward beyond Melbourne.



The Salvation Army's multicultural event unites communities

*On 23 April 2026, **The Salvation Army**'s multicultural launch at NSW Parliament House united leaders to support the **Red Shield Appeal***

OUR REPORTER
@the_indian_sun

The Salvation Army's national **Multicultural Launch** event, held as part of the annual **Red Shield Appeal**, took place on Thursday, 23 April 2026 at NSW Parliament House. The event was formally launched by distinguished leaders from government and business, including Dr. S. Janakiraman, Consul General of India in Sydney; Hon. Warren Kirby MP, NSW Parliament; and Marek Ristwej, Chair of Marque Capital and LBW Trust.

The event brought together business, community, and media leaders from 20+ community groups, raising awareness and supporting the work of The Salvation Army across Australia.

Now in it's 62nd year, The Red Shield Appeal is The Salvation Army's flagship fundraising appeal and Australia's largest and longest running door knock appeal. This year, The Salvation Army are aiming to raise $41 million nationally to fund vital work around the country in areas such as homelessness, family and domestic violence, youth, financial hardship, drug and alcohol rehabilitation, as well as the key work of The Salvation Army within multicultural communities.

Commissioner Miriam Gluyas, Territorial Commander of The Salvation Army said, "The Salvation Army have been committed to standing alongside ❮TURN TO #37❯



Bruce Harmer *CG Dr. S Janakiraman*

> Just two days ago, the global military spending report showed it rose by 2.9% to $2.8 trillion. How do we make sense of this enormous figure?

DR AMRITA KAPUR



Salvos Team

《CONTINUED FROM #36》 and supporting those from culturally and linguistically diverse communities for over 140 years, and we continue to provide services and programs in communities that have a lasting impact."

"The Salvation Army Multicultural launch provides The Salvos with an amazing opportunity to connect with multicultural community leaders who are passionate about supporting people within multicultural communities. We are also extremely grateful to Multiconnexions, who have supported The Salvation Army for over 20 years."

Warren Kirby MP, NSW Parliament, said: The Red Shield Appeal is one of Australia's most powerful expressions of collective compassion, uniting communities to restore dignity, resilience, and hope for those facing hardship. I deeply commend The Salvation Army for leading this enduring national effort, and MultiConnexions for strengthening its impact through meaningful community engagement.

Sheba Nandkeolyar, CEO of Multiconnexions and recipient of The Salvation Army's Eva Burrows Award, said: "We are proud to continue hosting The Salvation Army's Red Shield Appeal Multicultural Launch for over two decades. 'Be Hope' beautifully reflects the essence of multicultural Australia, where generosity transcends cultures, and giving becomes a shared responsibility that brings deeper meaning to our lives."

Across Australia last year, through The Salvation Army's network of over 400 centres and 2,000 services, the Salvos provided: *

- Assistance to one person every 17 seconds
- More than 1.74 million sessions of care to over 228,000 people in need
- Over 1 million nights of safe accommodation
- More than 1.4 million meals for those who accessed our homelessness services.

*To be the hope by donating to **The Salvation Army's Red Shield Appeal**, or if you need support from The Salvos, visit **salvationarmy.org.au** or call **13 SALVOS**. You can also donate at any Salvos Store.*



Jonathan Miriam



Jonathan & Emma - Testimonial Speaker


Sheba Nandkeolyar



Warren Kirby - MP, Member of Riverstone



Marek Ristwej

**The Salvation Army Annual Report 2025*

ABSC Inc hosts Media Conference and Dinner to promote EKONOMOS, Issue 7, 2026

OUR REPORTER
@the_indian_sun

On Monday, 20 April 2026, the **Australian Business Summit Council Inc.** hosted its Media Conference and Dinner at Aqua Luna Waterfront Dining with almost one hundred and seventy attendees for an evening that exemplified the strength of Australia's global business, trade and investment dialogue and engagement.

The prestigious event attracted a high-level gathering of VIPS and guests, featuring H.E. Ms. Arjaree Sriratanaban (Ambassador of Thailand); H.E. Mr. Diego Felipe Cadena Montenegro (Ambassador of Colombia); and Ms. Doris Adzo Denyo Brese (High Commissioner of Ghana); along with consuls general and senior representatives from China, Egypt, Malta, Poland, Romania, Ghana, South Korea, Somalia, Turkey and Pakistan, as well as eminent local business figures, including Dr. Joseph Rizk AM (CEO / Managing Director, Arab Bank Australia Ltd) and entrepreneur Mr. Garry Simonian, plus academics, industry professionals and members of the multicultural media.

ABSC Inc. President Dr. Frank Alafaci PhD depicted the evening as both a celebration and a preview—celebrating the relationships built through the Council's ongoing work, and previewing the upcoming seventh issue of EKONOMOS, its flagship business affairs magazine, emphasising that the Australian Business Summit Council Inc. is not simply an organisation, but a platform for engagement where diplomacy meets enterprise, ideas are exchanged with purpose, and partnerships are formed with a long-term vision.

Its centrepiece was the promotion of EKONOMOS, Issue 7, 2026 which continues to position itself as a meeting point of global perspectives, bringing together contributions from twenty-eight distinguished authors spanning diplomacy, business, academia and government, including ambassadors, high commissioners and leading industry figures whose insights reflect a shared commitment to enhancing international trade and investment.

The official program for the evening focussed on three keynote addresses that provided valuable insights into global economic engagement. Ambassador Ms. Arjaree Sriratanaban spoke on the importance of deepening trade and investment ties between Thailand and Australia, highlighting opportunities for collaboration across key sectors. Ambassador Mr. Diego Felipe Cadena 〈TURN TO #39〉


Dr. Frank Alafaci PhD (ABSC Inc. President)



H.E. Ms. Arjaree Sriratanaban (Ambassador of Thailand)


H.E. Mr. Diego Felipe Cadena Montenegro (Ambassador of Colombia)


Mr. Garry Simonian (Entrepreneur)

CONTINUED FROM #38

Montenegro followed with a perspective on Colombia's expanding international engagement, underscoring the important role of multilateral cooperation and sustainable development in advancing global partnerships. Entrepreneur Mr. Garry Simonian delivered a marvellous speech exploring the transformative impact of digital innovation, artificial intelligence and emerging technologies on international business and trade systems.

These keynote presentations were complemented by a one-hour interactive panel discussion moderated by the ABSC Inc. President Dr. Frank Alafaci PhD, which brought together the speakers to address key issues relating to business, trade and investment, and encouraged audience participation, creating a vibrant and inclusive exchange of ideas that reflected the diversity and expertise of those in attendance, while maintaining a clear focus on constructive, non-political dialogue.

Importantly, the success of the Media Conference and Dinner was supported by the generous contribution of sponsors, including Alliance Project Group; Arab Bank Australia Ltd; Symphonic Management Consulting; Trade Window; Serenade Leather; Blue River Wines; EZ Marketing Australia; and DRS ABCD First Aid Training, whose involvement reflects their industry confidence in the mission of the Australian Business Summit Council Inc.



In concluding the evening, the ABSC Inc. President Dr. Frank Alafaci PhD extended his sincere appreciation to the Council's Board of Directors and acknowledged the collective effort required to deliver an occasion of such scale and quality, paying special tribute to the ABSC Inc. Secretary Mrs. Sylvia Alafaci for her leadership in organising the Media Conference and Dinner, from venue selection and table arrangements to overall coordination, as well as to the Aqua Luna events team led by Ms. Anna Finini for their professionalism and support.

The 2026 ABSC Inc. Media Conference and Dinner demonstrated once again the important role in bringing together leaders from diplomacy, business and the wider community to strengthen international relationships and promote Australia as a globally connected and outward-looking economy. With strong momentum generated by this event, anticipation now turns to the ABSC Inc. Annual Gala Dinner on 29 May 2026, where EKONOMOS, Issue 7, 2026 will be formally launched, continuing the Council's efforts to connect Australia to the world.

ABSC Inc. President Dr. Frank Alafaci PhD depicted the evening as both a celebration and a preview—celebrating the relationships built through the Council's ongoing work, and previewing the upcoming seventh issue of EKONOMOS







Saravanaa Bhavan marks 10th Australian outlet with Sydney CBD launch

OUR REPORTER
@the_indian_sun

Popular South Indian vegetarian chain **Saravanaa Bhavan** has opened a new outlet in Sydney's CBD, marking its third location in the city and tenth across Australia.

The restaurant, located at 263 Clarence Street, will begin operations on Monday, 27 April with a soft launch, offering takeaway and delivery services. Dine-in is expected to begin in the coming weeks once the full opening is completed. Orders are available for pickup or through major delivery platforms across the CBD and nearby areas.

The opening adds to the brand's steady expansion across Australia, where it already has a presence in cities including Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide and Brisbane. The new CBD location places it in a busy part of the city, catering to office workers, visitors and local residents, as well as the South Asian community.

Founded in Chennai, Saravanaa Bhavan has grown into an international chain with outlets across more than 20 countries. It is known for its vegetarian menu based on South Indian cuisine, including dosas, idlis, vadas, thalis and traditional filter coffee. The focus, the company says, has remained on consistency in recipes and cooking methods across its outlets.

The Sydney opening begins with a limited format, allowing operations to settle before a full-scale launch. According **<TURN TO #41>**



Inside the new Saravanaa Bhavan at 263 Clarence Street, Sydney CBD // Photo supplied



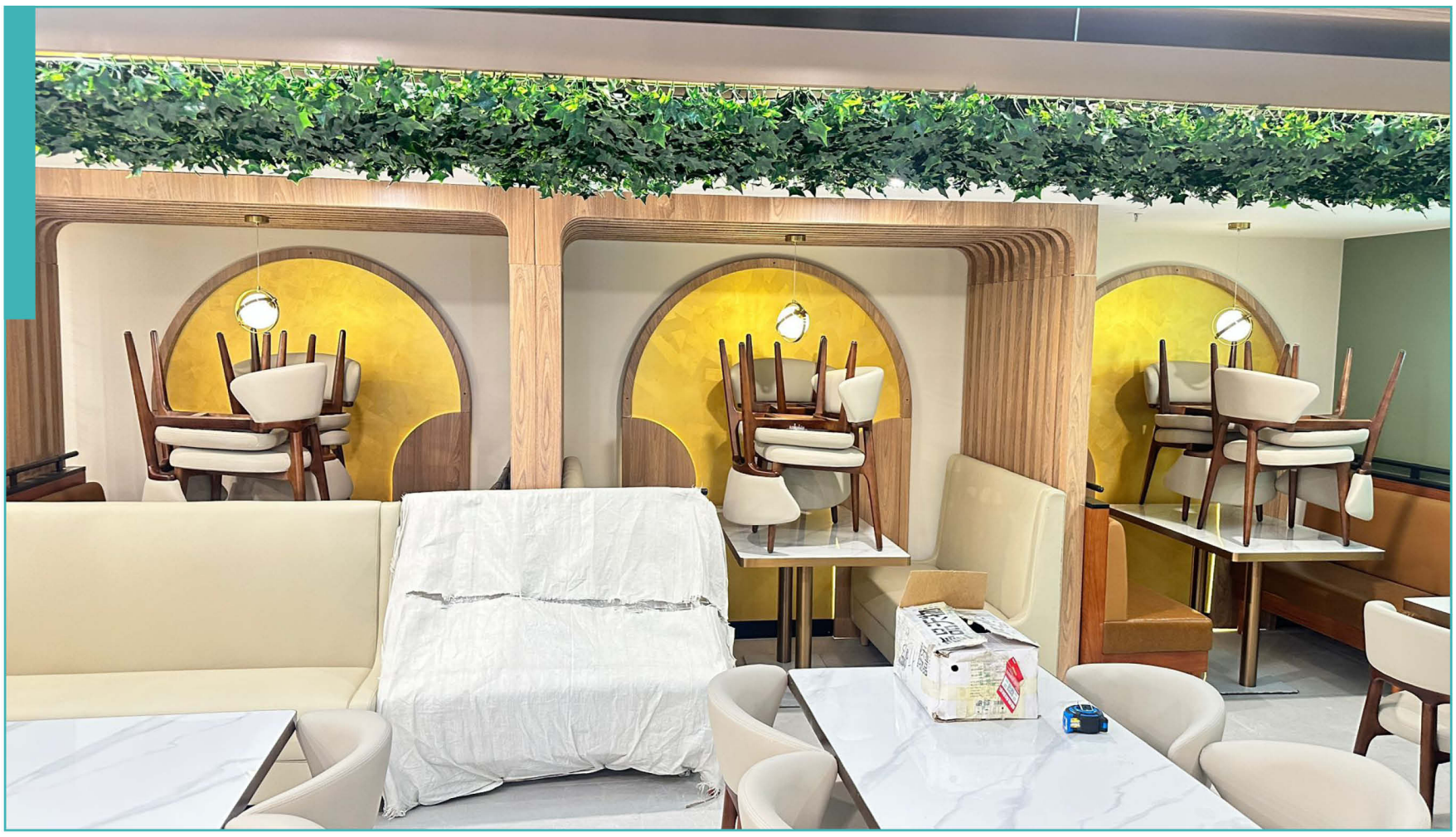
Saravanaa Bhavan's food is rooted in South Indian traditions. The same cultural and community connections seen around temples in Tamil Nadu—such as Madurai Meenakshi, Brihadeeswarar

CONTINUED FROM #40 to the company, the complete dine-in experience, along with a formal opening, will be introduced in the coming weeks.

Saravanaa Bhavan's food is rooted in South Indian traditions. The same cultural and community connections seen around temples in Tamil Nadu—such as Madurai Meenakshi, Brihadeeswarar and Kapaleeshwarar—are reflected in its focus on simple, shared vegetarian meals.

The restaurant's hallmark lies in its unwavering commitment to freshness, tradition, and the pure flavours of this heritage. Every dish is prepared using time-honoured recipes and the highest standards of hygiene—making it a beloved institution for the Indian diaspora and food enthusiasts alike.

The latest addition, therefore, reflects the continued growth of Indian dining options in Australia, particularly in metropolitan centres where demand for regional cuisines has been steadily rising.



For multicultural families, stigma delays autism support

DR. RAJ KHILLAN
@the_indian_sun

For many multicultural families, the hardest part is not the diagnosis, but the fear, stigma and delay that come before it.

THE CHILD IS SPEAKING, BUT ARE WE LISTENING?

On 2 April, buildings across Australia will glow blue for World Autism Awareness Day. Social media will fill with kind words. Schools will speak about inclusion. Communities will pause to acknowledge autistic children and adults, and the families who support them every day.

But behind many front doors, the reality is far more complicated.

There are parents who have been worried for months. Mothers who sense something is different but do not know how to say it aloud. Fathers who fear the label more than the struggle. Grandparents who insist the child will "grow out of it". Families who smile in public, but cry in private. Families who know something is not quite right, yet are too afraid, too confused or too overwhelmed to seek help.

That is why World Autism Awareness Day must mean more than blue lights.

For many multicultural families in Australia, the biggest barrier is not always autism itself. It is the silence around it.

THE FEAR THAT DELAYS THE FIRST STEP



Representational Photo by Ashwini Chaudhary(Monty) on Unsplash

For many **multicultural families**, the biggest barrier to **autism support** is not the diagnosis itself—it's the hidden fear, community stigma, and silence that delay

Autism often does not arrive with a dramatic announcement. It comes quietly. A child is slower to speak. A toddler does not respond to their name. A preschooler struggles with eye contact, noise, change or social interaction. A child may seem bright, loving and unique, but still find everyday communication and connection much harder than expected.

Parents notice these things. They usually do.

But noticing is one thing. Acting is another.

In many migrant and multicultural families, the first response is not always help-seeking. It is often hesitation. Some families hope the child will catch up. Some are reassured by relatives that "boys talk late". Some fear being judged. Some do not want their child labelled. Some worry that a diagnosis will bring shame, gossip or lifelong misunderstanding.

And so the waiting begins.

What starts as uncertainty can turn into months, sometimes years, of delay.

CULTURE, COMMUNITY AND QUIET STIGMA

In many communities, autism is still not openly understood. It may be confused with bad behaviour, stubbornness, poor parenting or simply being a "late bloomer". Some parents fear that others will blame the mother. Some worry about how the child will be treated at school, in the community or even within the extended family. Some fear what people will say. Others fear what people will stop saying.

This stigma is often hidden, but it is deeply powerful.

For many South Asian families, including Indian families, these fears can be shaped by experiences from back home, where developmental conditions may have been poorly understood or rarely discussed. Some families come to Australia without ever having seen autism explained clearly or compassionately. They may not know what support looks like. They may never have heard the message that early help can make a real difference.

Instead of clarity, they carry confusion.

Instead of support, they carry silence.

A SYSTEM THAT CAN FEEL IMPOSSIBLE

Even when families decide to seek help, the pathway is not always easy.

Australia has services, but for many families, those services can feel like a maze.

Parents may not know whether to start with a GP, paediatrician, psychologist, speech pathologist or occupational therapist. They may not understand how assessment works, what services are available, or how disability support systems fit into the picture.

For families who are new to Australia, this can be especially difficult. Healthcare systems vary enormously from country to country. What seems obvious to one family may be completely unfamiliar to another.

Language barriers make everything heavier. A parent may know exactly what they are worried about but not know how to explain it in English. Medical forms can feel intimidating. Reports can feel confusing. Questions may go unasked because families feel embarrassed or lost.

This is how children can fall behind, not because parents do not care, but because they do not know how to navigate the road ahead.

THE BURDEN IS HEAVIER OUTSIDE THE CITIES

For families in regional, rural and outer suburban areas, the barriers grow even larger. Getting to a specialist may require long travel, time off work, juggling other children and waiting months for appointments. Even where help exists, it may not be close, affordable or timely.

Cost is another hard reality.

Private assessment can be expensive. Public services can involve long waits. For families already dealing with rent, school costs, transport and everyday living pressures, the process can feel financially and emotionally exhausting.

For some multicultural families, there is another burden: isolation. Many do not have extended family nearby. Some have limited local support. Some are still finding their feet in Australia. When a child needs developmental assessment, parents can feel very alone.

WHY TRUST CHANGES EVERYTHING

As a paediatrician who has worked in India, Nepal, Saudi Arabia, the UK and Australia, I have seen how much culture shapes the autism conversation. I have also seen how quickly fear softens when families feel understood.

When parents can speak in their own language, they often share the real story. When grandparents hear autism explained respectfully, they may move from resistance to support. When clinicians understand family dynamics, migration stress, cultural pressures and community stigma, the conversation becomes safer.

That trust matters.

Speaking English, Hindi, Punjabi, Urdu and some Arabic has shown me again and again that families do not simply need information. They need reassurance. They need dignity. They need someone to tell them clearly that autism is not caused by bad parenting, not caused by bilingualism, and not something shameful to hide.

A diagnosis is not the end of hope. For many families, it is the beginning of understanding.

AWARENESS MUST REACH THE HOME

World Autism Awareness Day is important. It creates visibility. It reminds society to be more inclusive. It helps bring autism into public conversation.

But real awareness begins when fear leaves the family home.

It begins when parents feel safe to ask questions early. It begins when grandparents understand that early support is not a disgrace. It begins when communities stop whispering and start learning. It begins when services become easier to access, easier to understand and more culturally responsive.

In multicultural Australia, true autism awareness must be more than a campaign. It must be a bridge between families and help, between stigma and understanding, between silence and support.

So yes, let the buildings turn blue on 2 April.

But let us also make sure that behind those blue lights, no family is left sitting in confusion, fear or shame.

Dr Raj Khillan *is a Melbourne paediatrician, Founder and Director of Western Specialist Centre, and Victoria's Australian of the Year 2023. He is a leading voice in child development, autism awareness and multicultural health, and is deeply committed to helping families access early diagnosis, support and culturally sensitive care*

The hidden autism signs in girls: What we're missing in diagnosis

DR. RAJ & DR. PREETI KHILLAN
@the_indian_sun

Why bright, talkative girls are still being missed, and why autism in girls looks very different from boys?

For many families, the word autism still brings up an old stereotype: a boy who avoids eye contact, struggles to speak, plays alone, and shows obvious repetitive behaviours. That image is deeply familiar, and deeply incomplete.

Because many autistic girls do not look like that at all.

They may be bright, chatty, imaginative and academically capable. They may speak early, use advanced language, and appear socially interested. Some are described as mature for their age. Others are polite, gentle, helpful and eager to please. On the surface, they may look like they are coping well.

But underneath, many are struggling far more than anyone realises.

That is why autism in girls is so often missed.

NOT THE AUTISM WE WERE TAUGHT TO SEE

Autism is diagnosed more often in boys than girls. For years, people quoted a ratio of around four boys to every one girl. But many experts now believe the gap is not that simple. Girls are likely being under-recognised because autism in girls often presents differently.

Representational Photo by Hiki App on Unsplash

Many **autistic girls** are bright, verbal, and socially eager—but their struggles are hidden behind masking, leading to missed diagnoses and years of unnecessary

In other words, it is not always less common in girls. It is often less obvious.

The problem is that the traditional understanding of autism has been shaped largely by how it appears in boys. So, when a girl does not fit that picture, concerns are brushed aside. She may be called shy, anxious, sensitive, quirky, perfectionistic, dramatic or "just a bit different".

But sometimes that "difference" is autism that no one has recognised.

BRIGHT GIRLS CAN STILL STRUGGLE DEEPLY

One of the biggest myths is that a girl cannot be autistic if she is intelligent, verbal or doing well at school.

That is simply not true.

A girl may have a high IQ. She may speak beautifully. She may read early, ask thoughtful questions, and sound mature beyond her years. She may even look socially confident. But speaking well is not the same as finding social life easy.

Communication is more than words. It is knowing when to join in, how to keep a conversation flowing, how to read facial expressions, how to understand tone, sarcasm, hidden meanings, jokes, shifting friendships and unspoken rules.

This is where many autistic girls quietly struggle.

They may know how to talk but still feel lost in social situations. They may want friendships desperately but not know how to manage them. They may say all the right things, yet still come home feeling exhausted, confused and overwhelmed.

THE MASK THAT HIDES THE STRUGGLE

Many autistic girls are highly skilled at masking.

They watch other children closely. They copy speech, facial expressions, gestures and social habits. They force eye contact. They rehearse conversations before going to school or social events. They learn how to blend in.

To the outside world, this can look like social success.

But masking is not the same as ease. It is effort. It is performance. And it can be exhausting.

This is one of the biggest reasons girls are diagnosed later than boys. Adults see a girl who is talking, smiling and participating, and assume she is fine. What they may not see is how much energy it is taking her to appear fine.

That is why so many parents say the same thing: "She holds it together at school but falls apart at home."

That pattern matters. Home is often the only place where the mask comes off.

FRIENDSHIPS ARE OFTEN THE REAL BATTLEGROUND

Many autistic girls do not avoid friendship. In fact, many long for it deeply.

But friendship can be one of their greatest challenges.

A girl may have only one or two close friends. She may become intense, possessive or deeply hurt when those friendships change. She may struggle in groups, hover at the edge of social circles, or copy others just to stay included. She may seem socially interested but still not understand the hidden rules that hold peer groups together.

Some girls become "mothered" by classmates. Others are seen as overly sensitive, too serious or too controlling in play. Some have rich fantasy lives and vivid imaginations but prefer to direct play their own way. Some seem extroverted when talking about their favourite interest but become uncertain and anxious in everyday peer interaction.

It is not that they do not care. Often, they care deeply. That is what makes the struggle so painful.

WHEN INTERESTS LOOK ORDINARY, AUTISM GETS MISSED

Another reason girls are overlooked is that their interests may not look unusual at first glance.

A boy's intense interest in train timetables or vacuum cleaners may raise questions quickly. A girl's intense interest in animals, books, celebrities, music, fashion, mythology, art or fictional worlds may look perfectly typical.

But the clue is not always the topic. It is the intensity.

Many autistic girls have interests that are unusually deep, all-consuming, repetitive or rigid.

They may return to them constantly, talk about them endlessly, organise life around them, or become upset when those interests are interrupted.

Because the interest itself looks socially acceptable, the autistic pattern underneath can be missed.

THE HIDDEN COST OF BEING MISSED

A delayed diagnosis is not just a delay in getting a label. It is often a delay in understanding, support and self-protection.

When a girl spends years trying to fit in while feeling different inside, the emotional cost can be enormous. She may begin to think she is failing at being "normal". She may lose confidence. She may develop anxiety, low mood, school refusal, burnout or emotional shutdown. Some girls are treated only for anxiety or depression, while the autism underneath remains unseen.

By adolescence, the pressure often grows. Friendships become more layered. Social expectations become harder. Puberty adds another layer of confusion. The girl who once looked like she was coping may suddenly start to unravel.

And by then, the struggle has often been there for years.

FIRST SIGNS FAMILIES SHOULD NOT IGNORE

The signs in girls are often subtle, but they are there.

Parents and teachers should look more closely when a girl consistently seems exhausted after social settings, struggles to keep friendships despite wanting them badly, copies others to fit in, becomes overwhelmed by noise, clothing textures or food, shows intense interests, needs control in play, or releases all her distress only at home.

A girl can be chatty and still be autistic.

A girl can be bright and still be autistic.

A girl can make eye contact and still be autistic.

A girl can have friends and still be autistic.

That is the message we need to understand.

WE NEED A NEW LENS FOR GIRLS

The real question is not whether a girl "looks autistic". The real question is how much effort it is taking her to look as though she is not.

If we continue to judge autism only by old stereotypes, we will keep missing girls who need help, understanding and support. But if we widen our lens, listen carefully, and look beneath the surface, we can recognise these girls earlier and support them better.

And for many families, that recognition can change everything.

Dr Raj Khillan *is a Melbourne paediatrician, Founder and Director of Western Specialist Centre, and Victoria's Australian of the Year 2023. He is a leading voice in child development, autism awareness and multicultural health, and is deeply committed to helping families access early diagnosis, support and culturally sensitive care.*

Dr Preeti Khillan *is a senior Obstetrician and Gynaecologist and Director of Western Specialist Centre. A passionate advocate for women's, children's and family health, she is recognised for her leadership in community education and her commitment to delivering compassionate, culturally responsive healthcare.*

Growing up on the spectrum: Puberty, pressure and protection

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Why autistic children need clearer guidance, safer boundaries and more understanding in the teenage years

Puberty does not wait for a child to be ready. For autistic children, it can arrive with confusion, sensory distress, social pressure and a level of vulnerability that many families are not warned about. While the body may mature on time, understanding often does not, and that is where fear, frustration and risk can begin.

Autistic children go through the same physical changes as other children, but they do not always understand or manage those changes in the same way. A child may look older on the outside, yet still struggle with body awareness, emotional control, privacy, friendships and the hidden social rules that come with adolescence. That gap between physical growth and emotional readiness is why puberty in autism needs earlier conversations, clearer guidance and far more understanding.

WHEN A CHANGING BODY FEELS OVERWHELMING

Puberty brings many visible changes. Girls may begin breast development and periods. Boys may notice erections, wet dreams, body hair and voice changes. Both may experience body odour, acne, growth spurts and stronger emotions.



Representational Photo by Miles Monares on Unsplash

For **autistic children**, **puberty** brings confusing body changes, heightened emotions, and social risks. Clear guidance, early teaching, and safe boundaries are

For many autistic children, these changes are not just awkward, they can feel frightening. A child may not understand why their body feels different, why routines are changing, or why they are suddenly expected to manage new tasks on their own. Some may become upset by pain, smells, textures or the feeling of pads, bras, deodorant or new clothing. Others may not know how to explain what is bothering them.

What adults see as a normal step in growing up can feel like a loss of control to an autistic teenager. When that distress is missed, the child is often labelled difficult instead of being properly supported.

BIG EMOTIONS, BUT NOT ALWAYS THE WORDS

Puberty is not only a physical change. It is also a time of bigger feelings, greater self-consciousness and rising social pressure.

Many autistic young people already find it hard to manage stress, sensory overload or sudden change. Puberty can magnify all of this. Some may become more anxious, more emotional or more withdrawn. Others may have more meltdowns, more shutdowns or stronger reactions that families and schools struggle to understand.

The real problem is that behaviour is often judged without asking what is driving it.

Sometimes the child is not being rude, defiant or dramatic. They may be overwhelmed, confused, embarrassed or frightened. They may be struggling with pain, body changes they do not understand, or social situations they cannot read. Puberty can make a child feel unsettled in their own skin, and many do not have the words to explain why.

THE SOCIAL RULES BECOME HARDER TO READ

As children enter adolescence, the world around them also changes. Friendships become more layered. There may be gossip, teasing, flirting, crushes and pressure to fit in. Suddenly, teenagers are expected to understand privacy, boundaries, personal space and what is socially acceptable.

For autistic children, these hidden rules are often much harder to pick up.

They may not realise when someone is joking, mocking or manipulating them. They may mistake attention for friendship. They may not recognise when a conversation, touch or online interaction is inappropriate. They may copy behaviour they have seen elsewhere without understanding when, where or why it is not acceptable.

This is one of the greatest hidden challenges of puberty in autism. Society expects teenagers to "just know", but many autistic teenagers need these rules taught clearly, directly and many times over.

PERIODS, WET DREAMS AND PRIVATE WORRIES

One of the biggest problems for families is silence. Parents often feel awkward starting the conversation. Schools may keep the topic too broad. Children may not know what to ask or may not even realise that a question needs asking.

That is why practical teaching matters so much.

A girl may have heard of periods but still panic when she sees blood for the first time. A boy may be frightened by a wet dream if nobody has explained it beforehand. A child may know the word "puberty" but still have no idea how often to change a pad, when to shower more often, how to use deodorant, or what should happen only in private.

Autistic children need clear, step-by-step guidance. They need plain words, repetition and reassurance. They need to know what changes may happen, what to do when they happen, and who they can go to for help.

A SERIOUS RISK FAMILIES MUST NOT IGNORE

Puberty also brings a more difficult truth: autistic children and teenagers can be more vulnerable to bullying, manipulation and sexual abuse.

A child who trusts easily, wants to please others, or struggles to understand body boundaries may be at greater risk. Some may not realise that something wrong has happened. Others may feel uncomfortable but may not have the language, confidence or emotional skills to tell anyone.

That is why body safety teaching is essential.

Children need to know the correct names for body parts. They need to understand that their body belongs to them. They need to learn the difference between safe touch and unsafe touch. They need to know that private parts are private, that nobody should ask them to keep secrets about touching, and that they can always tell a trusted adult if something feels wrong.

Silence does not protect children. Clear teaching does.

WHAT PARENTS, SCHOOLS AND SOCIETY NEED TO DO

The answer is not fear. The answer is preparation.

Start early. Use plain language. Repeat key messages often. Teach body changes before they happen, not after a child is frightened. Use pictures, visual supports, simple routines and real-life practice. Explain public and private behaviour clearly. Talk about periods, erections, hygiene, consent, personal boundaries and online safety without shame.

Parents should not have to carry this burden alone. Schools need to make puberty education more practical and inclusive. Health professionals need to give families simple, useful guidance. Society also needs to stop assuming that because a child looks older, they understand more.

A child may look grown up but still need a great deal of support to manage emotions, friendships, privacy and safety.

GROWING UP WITH DIGNITY

Autism does not stop puberty, and puberty does not erase autism.

When these two worlds meet, children need more patience, more honesty and more protection. With the right support, autistic children can learn to understand their changing bodies, manage emotions, protect their boundaries and move into adolescence with greater confidence.

The goal is not to make them seem like everyone else. The goal is to help them grow up safe, informed and respected.

Every child deserves that.

Dr Preeti Khillan *is an Obstetrician and Gynaecologist based in Melbourne, with a strong interest in women's health, family wellbeing and culturally sensitive healthcare. Through clinical work and community education, she is passionate about helping families better understand children's development, puberty, safety and emotional wellbeing*



Stuart DaCosta on bass

Pack Your Feelings. The Yellow Diary arrives from Mumbai



After years of fan requests, Mumbai alt-rock band **The Yellow Diary** finally bring their Hindi-English debut album to Australia this May for their first tour

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When **The Yellow Diary** land in Australia this May, it will not feel like a first meeting. For years, listeners here have been writing to the Mumbai-based band, asking them to come down under. The music has travelled ahead of them.

I caught up with the band on Zoom just before they packed their bags for Australia. It marks their first tour here, a moment they say has been a long time coming.

"We already have people who listen to our music and keep writing to us," says vocalist Rajan Batra. "So it doesn't feel like we are performing for an entirely new audience. But we are definitely looking forward to doing it for the first time."

The band, known for blending Hindi poetry with a modern alt-rock and pop sound, is touring Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne with their debut album In Case We Forget. It is a long way from where they began in 2015, playing small gigs and asking friends to turn up.

"At our first show, we asked all our friends to come," Rajan recalls. "We performed for them, and when they enjoyed it, that feeling stayed with us."

That feeling, he says, has only grown over time. From those early shows to festival stages like NH7 Weekender, and now to international tours, the band has built what they call a "community" around their music.

"The community keeps giving," he says. "When people sing back to us and feel the emotions we write about, it becomes very rewarding."

At the heart of it all is the idea behind their name. The Yellow Diary is not just a band title, it is a way of thinking about their music.

"It comes from how the songs are written," explains music producer and keyboardist Himonshu Parikh. "They come from personal experiences, thoughts, things you would journal. Like coming home and saying, 'Dear diary, this is what happened today.'"

And the colour yellow?

"For us, yellow is a mysterious colour," he says. "It looks happy, but it carries a range of emotions. From very dark to very bright. Every song is like a different page in that diary."

That openness is what gives the band its sound. It is not something they **<TURN TO #51>**



Harsh on guitars



Sahil Shah on drums



That sense of connection has also shaped their ambitions. Once seen as part of India's independent music scene, the band now sees itself differently



L-R: Rajan (v), Sahil (d), Stuart (b), Harsh (g), Himonshu (k)

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<CONTINUED FROM #49> sat down to design. "It is not something we searched for," Himonshu says. "It is just who we are and what we listen to. We never say, 'let's sound like this'. We just express and see what comes out."

Drummer Sahil Shah agrees that this mix is what connects with listeners, especially those outside India.

"There is always a bit of nostalgia when you are playing to an audience away from home," he says. "But at the same time, we represent a modern sound. So it becomes a balance of both."

That balance carries into their live shows. The band is known for stretching songs, playing with arrangements and building a strong connection with the audience.

"The crowd is the final piece of the puzzle," Sahil says. "When they sing the songs back to us, everything feels complete. That is the biggest validation for us."

Guitarist Harsh, the quietest of the group, puts it simply. "Music explains itself," he says. "We don't really need to explain it."

The new album, In Case We Forget, leans into reflection. The title itself came from a moment of looking back.



"At first, it felt like we were writing diary entries," Rajan says. "Now it feels like a journal of our journey. This album became a way to remember who we were when we wrote this music."

"We are constantly travelling together, living together," he says. "It has made us tighter as a band, like a family. And we have realised that no matter which city we go to, there is a certain similarity in our audience."

That sense of connection has also shaped their ambitions. Once seen as part of India's independent music scene, the band now sees itself differently.

"When we started, we were doing everything ourselves," Rajan says. "But over time, we found support from labels, brands, collaborators. I think we have moved beyond just being an independent band."

He adds, "We want to become an Indian global act. To go to the biggest platforms and represent India."

Australia is one step in that journey.

Asked what audiences here can expect, the answer is unanimous.

"All of the above," Harsh says, when offered a choice between explosive and quiet.

Himonshu expands on that. "All their favourite songs, all the new songs, and a really electric live experience. It will be emotional. We love spending time with our listeners."

And when they land?

"Beat the jet lag," Sahil laughs.

"Go hug some koalas," Rajan adds.

Himonshu has a simpler plan. "Get a burger straight away."

Between the humour and the music, one thing is clear. The Yellow Diary is not just bringing a setlist to Australia. They are bringing a body of work built on memory, emotion and the quiet hope that someone, somewhere, will see themselves in it.

And if the messages they have been getting are anything to go by, Australia is ready to sing them back.

Catch The Yellow Diary live in Brisbane, Sydney & Melbourne this May.


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Presented by ACMI and RISING, The Vinyl Factory: Reverb is now open at ACMI



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Originally produced and staged at 180 Studios in London, the exhibition features works by Stan Douglas, Jenn Nkiru, William Kentridge, Jeremy Deller, Virgil Abloh, Kahlil Joseph, Gabriel Moses, Cecilia Bengolea, Julianknxx and Carsten Nicolai. It also showcases The Vinyl Factory Collection, and original commissions shown to celebrate 20 years of artistic collaborations.

The exhibition explores vinyl culture and music's influence on art, fashion, film and social movements. It dives into different eras and energies of music, from the early days of techno and house to contemporary digital art. From Kingston's dancehall scene to the late-80s 'Second Summer of Love', and beyond.

Get immersed in a sculptural sound system. Jump on the Technics and play with endlessly remixable vinyl loops. Dip into the hypnotism of a six-hour jam film set in a reconstruction of 'The Church'—the legendary New York studio where Miles Davis, Pink Floyd and Bob Dylan recorded. Witness a fantasy rap battle racing down copper lines from Cairo to London. Roam The Vinyl Factory's eclectic archive of 100 pressings from Massive Attack, Grace Jones, Daft Punk and more.

Head to the Listening Room and select from a curated collection of records for some deep listening. This London hit is an acoustically optimised sanctuary for pristine sound. After hours, the room hosts weekly one-off sessions, giving you the chance to see local and international artists up close, with additional events during RISING. Selected sessions are curated by Yasmine Sharaf, presenter for Triple R's Cease + Desist and a specialist in underground sounds.

For more info go to ***https://www.acmi.net.au/whats-on/the-vinyl-factory-reverb/***

Cairns to host para-swimmer Muhammed Aasim for community meet and greet





OUR REPORTER
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Cairns will host a community meet and greet this Saturday with Indian para-swimmer **Muhammed Aasim**, as the athlete continues advanced training in Far North Queensland and draws attention for his journey in para swimming.

The event will be held at Stellarossa Earlville Cafe, where families, young people and community members are invited to meet Aasim and hear about his experience in international sport. Organisers say the session will offer a relaxed setting for conversation and engagement.

Aasim, who lives with a 90 per cent physical disability, began swimming only a few years ago and has since ❮TURN TO #55❯



> This is more than just a meet and greet—it's about coming together as a community to celebrate courage and support a mission that uplifts others
>
> **AN ORGANISER**

<CONTINUED FROM #54>

progressed to competing globally. His development in para swimming has drawn interest within the Cairns community and among members of the Indian diaspora in Australia.

Attendees will hear directly from Aasim about his training, discipline and approach to competition. The session is expected to focus on both his sporting pathway and the personal challenges he has faced.

The gathering will also include a fundraising initiative to support Aasim's foundation, which works to improve access to sport and opportunities for people with disabilities. Organisers say the aim is to build support for his ongoing work and future competitions.

"This is more than just a meet and greet—it's about coming together as a community to celebrate courage and support a mission that uplifts others," one organiser said.

Community leaders say the event reflects the role of multicultural engagement in regional centres such as Cairns, where visiting athletes and international connections continue to shape local participation in sport.

Aasim's visit comes as Cairns strengthens its position as a training destination for athletes, supported by climate conditions and sporting infrastructure in Far North Queensland. His presence has added interest among local swimmers and youth groups.

Organisers say the event is open to all and expect a mix of community members, including families and students, to attend. The session is positioned as an opportunity for young people to engage with an athlete competing at an international level in para swimming.

For the Indian community in Cairns, the visit has been described as a point of connection, while for the broader public it provides exposure to disability sport and inclusive participation.

The meet and greet will take place this Saturday at Stellarossa Earlville Cafe, with proceeds from the fundraising effort directed towards Aasim's foundation and future initiatives.

From accountant to WWE fighter: Shanky Singh hits Melbourne



OUR REPORTER
@the_indian_sun

There's something disarmingly simple about the way **Shanky Singh** tells his story. No grand claims, no larger-than-life drama—just a quiet honesty about how far he's come.

"I'm still on that journey in my wrestling career," he said over Zoom from India before his recent main event in Melbourne.

Before wrestling, Shanky was working as an accountant at a university—a stable, respectable job, the kind many middle-class families would be proud of. Wrestling wasn't even on his radar.

"I had never really thought that I would go into the wrestling business," he said.

But something didn't sit right.

"The turning point was that everyone has something they truly like in life. When I was working as an accountant, I didn't really enjoy it. So I changed my path." **<TURN TO #57>**



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 #56>

That decision—to walk away from certainty—came with its own struggles. No sports background, no family legacy in wrestling. Just a guy who decided to take a hard left turn.

"I faced many tough situations when I started my wrestling career," he said.

He built his way up the hard way, performing across India—from Karnal to Udaipur, Dehradun to Haldwani—learning the craft one show at a time. There were small breaks too, including a role in the Bollywood movie Bharat alongside Salman Khan and Katrina Kaif.

Then came the moment that changed everything. WWE noticed him. He'd tried out earlier in Dubai in 2017 and didn't make the cut. Then in 2019, another chance. He got selected. By January 2020, he was on his way to the US for four months.

"It was a very big experience," he said. "The journey has been amazing because I started out as an accountant and ended up in wrestling."

Ahead of his match on April 26th in Melbourne against former WWE star Parker Boudreaux, Shanky promised fans a show. Looking back, he knew what they expected. "Melbourne fans can expect proper entertainment—the kind of entertaining wrestling match people want to see."

What was the biggest lesson WWE taught him? Discipline.

"If you have discipline in life, if you value timing, if you understand that timing is everything... For example, you gave me 9:30 and I was here before time."

His diet is strict—protein, carbs, good fats, chicken, white rice, oats. Repetitive. Controlled.

He's around seven feet tall, and yes, being that tall helps in the ring. But off it? "Is finding a girlfriend hard with your height?" he was asked. His answer: "Yeah, very, very difficult. Very difficult."

The glamour of wrestling often hides the physical toll. There was a time when his family was very worried. In one brutal match, he took 34 chair shots from Drew McIntyre—a beating that would have broken most. He remembered it not with bitterness, but with unfinished business.

He said he was still waiting for that moment of revenge—"when I will give him double of that one day."

For Shanky, stepping into the ring was never just personal. "It's a big opportunity. Not many people get this chance," he said. "It feels good to represent our people."

He was also clear-eyed about the gaps back home.

"India doesn't have that kind of wrestling platform yet... India still needs a stronger wrestling platform."

His message to the crowd in Victoria ahead of the bout? "You'll get the best, maybe even a championship-level performance, and you'll feel proud that Shanky has come here to win."

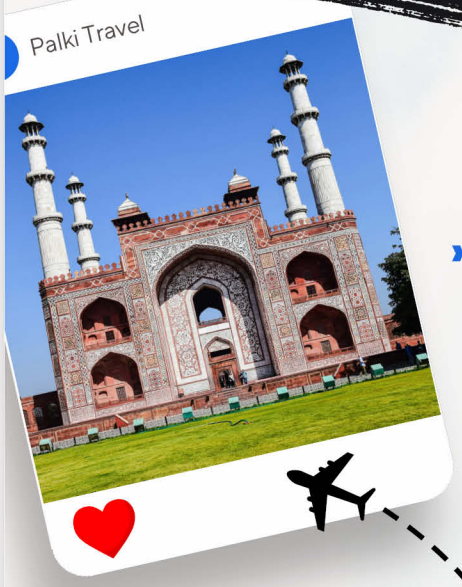
From a desk job to a main event in Melbourne—that's Shanky Singh. And while the final bell has already rung on that April night, his journey, as he puts it, is still very much in motion.

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