

KHAASBAAT

A PUBLICATION FOR INDIAN AMERICANS IN FLORIDA

NOVEMBER 2023

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Here are some of the Florida communities celebrating the Festival of Lights

TAMPA/PINELLAS PARK/SEFFNER

Gujarati Samaj of Tampa Bay is hosting a Diwali dinner from 5 p.m. on Saturday, Nov. 18, at Florida State Fairgrounds, 4800 U.S. 301, Tampa. Bombay Ki Bahar Akshay Tamayche will perform from 8 p.m. onward. The event is free for GSTB members, \$50 non-members. For information, call Mukesh Patel at (727) 505-4636.

ORLANDO/CASSELBERRY

Hindu Society of Central Florida (1994 Lake Drive) in Casselberry will celebrate Diwali and Annakut from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Saturday, Nov. 18, with several competitions (some on Nov. 11) and cultural programs, fireworks; parking \$10. For information, call (407) 574-1814 or visit www.orlandohindutemple.org

SOUTH FLORIDA

FORT LAUDERDALE: The Indian Regional and Cultural Center will hold its Diwali festivities from noon to 10 p.m. on Saturday, Nov. 18, at Broward County Convention Center, 1950 Eisenhower Blvd., Fort Lauderdale. The program will include music and dance performances, including bhangra, Bollywood, folk dances. Other attractions are food, fashion, jewelry and henna. For tickets and other information, call Sanjay Gupta at (954) 461-4003 or visit www.irccflorida.org

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TAMPA INDIA FEST NOV. 4

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WHO'S WHO

Khaas Baat is a monthly publication that has been in circulation since August 2004. Issues are direct mailed to subscribers and also are available at South Asian grocery stores and restaurants. It presents exclusive, informative and relevant news about the Indian American community in Florida to its readers.

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EVENTS / SIGNIFICANT DATES

EVENTS

TAMPA/ST. PETERSBURG/CLEARWATER
NOV. 4: 34th ANNUAL INDIA FESTIVAL; organized by the Gujarati Samaj of Tampa Bay; 11 a.m. to 10 p.m.; Florida State Fairgrounds, 4800 U.S. 301 N., Tampa; for information, call Chair Jyoti Gandhi at (727) 534-3767 or visit <https://www.indiafestivaltampabay.com/>

NOV. 8: BOLLYWOOD FILM SERIES; "Dabangg" (Hindi with English subtitles) starring Salman Khan; New Tampa Performing Arts Center, 8550 Hunters Village Road, Tampa; 7:30 p.m.; \$5; for information, visit www.NewTampaArtsCenter.org



NOV. 14: HANUMAN CHALISA; second Tuesday of month; Vishnu Mandir Tampa, 5803 Lynn Road; 7 to 9 p.m.; for information, call Deo Gajadhar at (813) 817-9714.

NOV. 15: ICC SENIORS GET-TOGETHER; India Cultural Center, 5509 Lynn Road, Tampa; 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.; free seminar, lunch and entertainment; only for 65 years and older; for information, text email address along with your name to Bhikhu

NOV. 10: DIWALI FESTIVITIES BEGIN NOV. 27: GURU NANAK JAYANTI

Nayi at (631) 560-2718 to receive details about seniors gathering every month; or call Mahesh Modha at (813) 476-1540.

ORLANDO/CASSELBERRY

NOV. 5: HSCF NEW AGE GROUP MEETING; Hindu Society of Central Florida community hall, 1994 Lake Drive, Casselberry; 1:30 to 3:30 p.m.; Interfaith Reunion theme focuses on importance of collective prayer for global peace; speakers of every faith invited; tea/coffee party with snacks; free with prior RSVP to hscfnewagegroup@gmail.com

NOV. 15: HARSH GUJRAL LIVE; standup comedy show presented by Oriole Productions; 7 p.m.; PAC, Edgewater High School, 3100 Edgewater Drive, Orlando; tickets start at \$39; for information, call (407) 323-7979 or purchase tickets at sulekha.com



Disclaimer: Event details are subject to change. Please check with local organizers. Event submissions are free, e-mail information to editor@khaasbaat.com by the 20th.

34TH ANNUAL TAMPA INDIA FESTIVAL ON NOV. 4

By **NITISH S. RELE** – editor@khaasbaat.com

One of the most popular events in the Southeast is back, the 34th annual daylong India Festival organized by the Gujarati Samaj of Tampa Bay. More than 12,000 people are expected to attend the event, says Jyoti Gandhi, Chair, for the India Festival at the Florida State Fairgrounds on Nov. 4 in Tampa.

About 192 booths offering food, a variety of fashion, clothes, financial services, jewelry, arts and crafts, and home décor will be set up in the Expo Hall and just outside the hall. Food vendors will offer a variety of Indian delicacies from samosas, dosa, pav bhaji to chicken tikka, to falooda/Indian-flavored ice cream and, of course, everyone's favorite chai. In the adjacent Entertainment Hall, performers of all ages will be decked out in traditional attire for four categories of dance competition – garba, raas, folk and bhangra. India Festival dance practice has become a right of passage for many families, especially in the Bay area.

Throughout the hall, several closed-circuit TV monitors will be set up so people can shop and eat while watching the dance performances.



Photos by Shriyan Photography

Indian-American communities from Miami, Fort Lauderdale, West Palm Beach, Melbourne, Daytona Beach, Jacksonville, Gainesville and Ocala among

others will be participating in dozens of competitions. Hillsborough County and Tampa City Council members are expected to be in attendance, as in the past years. Tampa Mayor Jane Castor will light the diya for the opening of the fest.

The India Festival will be from 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Nov. 4 at the Florida State Fairgrounds, 4800 U.S. 301 N., Tampa. Tickets are \$14 for adults; \$12 for children 5 to 12 years of age; kids under 5 are free; parking is \$13. For

information, call Jyoti Gandhi at (727) 534-3767 or visit www.indiafestivaltampabay.com





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MONTHLY EVENTS	WEEKLY EVENTS
SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 05 (5:20 PM to 7:00 PM) • JAGNNATH BHAJAN	EVERY MONDAY - 6:30 PM • SHIV ABHISHEK AND PUJA
FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 10 (8:00 PM) • DHANTERAS LAXMI AARTI	EVERY TUESDAY - 7:00 PM • HANUMAM KATHA
SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 11 (5:30 PM to 8:00 PM) • KALI CHODASH SUNDERKAND PATH	EVERY THURSDAY - 7:00 PM • SAI BABA SATSANG
SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 12 (6:00 PM to 7:00 PM) • DEEPAWALI LAXMI PUJA	• MAHA PRASAD
MONDAY, NOVEMBER 13 (6:30 PM to 8:00 PM) • ANNKOOT • GOVERDHAN PUJA & AARTI	
SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 19 (5:00 PM to 7:00 PM) • JALARAM JANMOTSAV	
THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 23 (6:30 PM to 8:00 PM) • TULSI VIVAH	
SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 26 (4:00 PM to 6:00 PM) • ANANAD NO GARBO	
SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 26 (6:30 PM to 7:30 PM) • KARTIK PURNIMA DEV DIWALI DARSHAN	

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CAN WE PREVENT GETTING CANCER?

By **DR. VENKIT IYER, MD, FACS**



Everyone is afraid of cancer. Diagnosis of the disease often implies complex treatment, disabilities, surgery, chemotherapy and eventual death. Even doctors are afraid of the C word. It is indeed a scary situation for most people.

Fortunately, now many of the cancers can be effectively treated and even cured. Medical science has made remarkable progress. People are living longer than ever. Those with cancers considered incurable at one time are now living for 10- and 20 years. This is made possible by improved tests allowing early detection and surgery, and

better medical treatments.

What is cancer? It is an uncontrolled rapid growth of cells in a certain tissue or location resulting in a tumor or a derangement, which in turn, leads to more aftereffects, dysfunctions and eventual death. If we know what initiates this transformation or misbehavior of the cells, it would be easy to take steps to stop that process.

However, we have only theories as to the exact cause of cancer. But we do know of various risk factors that can increase the chance of getting the disease. If we can address these risk factors, then we can reduce the likelihood of catching it. Moreover, if we can detect them early, better cure can be expected with earlier treatment.

Not all cancers are the same. Some are mild and slow growing, while others aggressive and fast growing. There is no single remedy or silver bullet to stop the malignant cells. A whole lot of precautions, lifestyle issues and preventive medical steps are needed for overall benefit. The old saying goes "God helps those who help themselves." In other words, we must take our own efforts to reap benefits.

Let us see how we can prevent or reduce the risk of certain cancers.

Skin cancers are common, especially as we age and are exposed to the sun and environment. It helps to reduce exposure to direct ultraviolet rays from sunlight for long hours, by wearing protective clothing and hat that covers body and head, and applying sunscreen lotions. Early biopsies and removal of any abnormal looking moles or growths will enhance the chance of cure.

Smoking cigarettes, vaping and use of tobacco in any form are well-proven to cause lung and oral cancers. It is a harmful habit that one can break with some effort. Those who have had history of smoking for over 15 years are recommended to get a low dose CAT scan of the chest once a year as a screening test for early detection of lung cancers, so that they can be treated more effectively.

If breast cancer is detected and treated early, one can hope for 90 percent chance for cure nowadays. Self-examination and screening mammograms are two good measures for early detection. Those who have family history of breast cancers, prior uterine or ovarian problems and nulliparity are at higher risk. Regular

exercise and diet with less red meat and cola drinks are more beneficial for women at risk. Once an abnormality is detected, additional procedures are done to finalize the diagnosis and treat to completion.

Men get prostate problems as they get old. PSA testing and routine prostate examination will help detect prostate cancers early on. Women can get cancer of the cervix or uterus. Pap smear tests will help early detection. Any menstrual abnormalities should be reported to a physician early on. If women take HPV vaccination, it will reduce the chance for cancer of the cervix. The vaccine also helps to lower anorectal and oral cancers. Shots against hepatitis help reduce liver cancers.

Colorectal cancers can be spotted earlier by doing screening colonoscopy on all individuals between the ages of 45 to 75. Polyps can be excised before they become cancers. Polyps are precursors for the dreaded disease. They should also report any blood in the stool. One can test for occult blood in the stool via a hemoccult test. Cologuard DNA test is also available.

Routine blood test is helpful in detecting blood cancers and anaemia in initial stages. A screening blood test is being developed to find several types of cancers by gene technology. This is called liquid biopsy.

Routine physical examination by a primary care doctor at least twice a year is needed to follow up on physical checkup, and discuss all screening tests and blood tests. Any and all unusual symptoms, appearance of subcutaneous lumps, new onset moles, nonhealing wounds, unexplained weight loss, fatigue and loss appetite or alteration in bowel habits should be reported and investigated.

Those people with family history of cancers or history of previous cancers or history of exposure to cancerogenic agents or work in radiology or nuclear-related fields or live in polluted neighbourhoods should be more cautious about getting cancers. Good hygienic habits, safe sex precautions and healthy lifestyle choices are of significance.

Regular exercise for at least 30 minutes every day is proven to reduce all types of the feared disease. Obesity is a risk factor and maintaining proper body weight helps decrease that risk. Healthy diet to reduce cancers consists of vegetarian food with nuts, fruits, legumes, lean proteins, whole grains and olive oil and fish oil, while avoiding processed food, red meat and sugary snacks. Addictive drugs and excess alcohol consumption should be avoided.

These are good measures to reduce onset of cancers or early detection of cancers. Genetics and unknown factors do play a role. But healthy lifestyle choices can significantly reduce your overall risk of the disease.

Dr. Venkit S. Iyer, MD, FACS, is a retired General and Vascular Surgeon. He has authored four books – "Decision making in clinical surgery," "Aging well and reaching beyond," "The Clinic" and "Geriatrics Handbook." They are available through Amazon or from the author. His website venkitiyer.com has necessary links and contact information.

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WRITING MEDICAL SCHOOL ESSAYS IS HARD

By **ROBERT A.G. LEVINE**



Applying to medical school is the culmination of a rigorous college career. Students must achieve excellent scores; perform well on the MCAT examination; build a resume of relevant experiences; and, of course, prepare their admissions applications.

Here is an absolute truth that most applicants do not appreciate until it's too late: there are a lot of secondary essays for medical school.

How many is "a lot"? If you are ambitious in your pursuit of medical school, expect to write over 100 secondary essays, perhaps closer to 150.

Oh, and each school tells you to write their essays within two weeks. If you are writing for several schools at one time ...

It's a lot, and there's not that much time.

We would like to offer you a two simple tips on how to lessen the load. After all, you must do great work, not just good work, to get the results you desire.

Tip Number One: Apply to Fewer Schools

With the difficulty in achieving acceptance by a medical school, applying to fewer schools may sound like blasphemy. It's not. Most applicants create a blended list of schools, searching for reach, target and "safety" schools based upon all manner of statistical criteria. Let's be aware of what does not work.

First, applying to public medical schools outside your home state is a questionable strategy. Remember, public schools are ... public. They are funded by the tax dollars of the citizens of that state. Consequently, they are looking for students who will likely treat the people of their state by practicing in their state. If you're not a resident, are you really going to be selected?

As example, we had a student who intended to apply to the University of North Dakota School of Medicine and Health Sciences. On its website, UND specifically addresses applicant eligibility: "Anyone can apply to UND SMHS, but as a state-supported school, we grant admissions preference to North Dakota residents or those who have strong ties to the state. We also admit a small number of applicants from Minnesota and Montana."

The applicant is from Florida. He went to school in the Ivy League. He has no connection to the state of North Dakota. Yes, this applicant was a strong candidate, but not for UND. We convinced him to skip this school.

Another Florida applicant was considering the University of South Carolina for

his medical school. Upon receiving the opportunity to write secondary essays, he noticed that the school uses six criteria for selecting its students. Not being a resident of South Carolina, this applicant only met two of the six criteria. Skip it!

These two examples may suggest that you avoid one or two out-of-state medical schools. However, unless you have some other good nexus to the state, our advice is to avoid all out-of-state medical schools.

Tip Number Two: Prepare Your Thoughts In Advance

There are three phases in the medical school application process: filing your (American Medical College Application Service) AMCAS document; secondary essays; and interviews.

The AMCAS filing period usually begins at the end of May. After filing, you will have two weeks to one month before getting requests for the additional secondary essays. Use that time wisely.

It would be nice if all the medical schools use the same essay prompts, but they don't. You are likely to get a "why medicine" or "why this medical school" prompt from most schools. You are also likely to get questions about how you faced challenges, or how you overcame disadvantages, or any number of topics. Please review each school's essay prompts from the prior year; perhaps they will repeat those prompts.

However, please also note that this coming year's prompts may be very different from last year's prompts. On June 29, 2023, the Supreme Court came out with its decision addressing affirmative action in college admissions. Logically, the court's ruling will also apply to graduate admissions.

Although we saw the colleges change their essay prompts to comport with the new law, the medical schools did not. Why? Secondary essay prompts were already finalized and given out before the court's decision. We anticipate that the medical schools will alter their prompts next year and, if their action is anything like what the colleges did, there will be more essays than before.

We want you to achieve the best possible admissions results. When it comes to medical schools, less is more.

Robert Levine is the founder and CEO of University Consultants of America, an independent educational consultancy assisting students around the world with applications to colleges, universities and graduate schools.

For more information, call University Consultants of America, Inc. at 1-800-465-5890 or visit www.universitycoa.com

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Under the Cover



“A Primer on Geriatrics” by Venkit Iyer, MD, and David Bernstein, MD; 250 pages; \$29.95 (available on Amazon); also visit Dr. Iyer’s Website: www.venkitiyer.com

By Dr. RAVINDRA NATHAN, MD, FACS

As you already know, the population is aging and life expectancy is getting better in most countries, especially the U.S. Currently, the share of the world population that is 60 years or older is just over 1 billion and expected to double by 2050. The number of 80-year-olds is projected to triple by 2050 and there is every reason to believe the trend will continue. What does this mean? As you advance in years, you are likely to develop more illnesses and disabilities. And

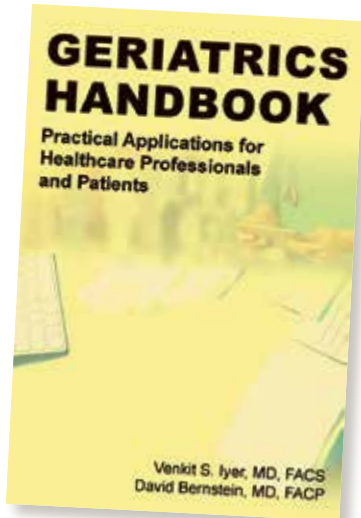
these will need specialized attention and care from physicians and other caregivers. In other words, we will be seeing and treating a lot of older or geriatric patients in the future. Another aspect is these folks are also part of our large economy, performing many important services in society. Whether it’s health care industry, politics, art and literature or entertainment industry, you’ll find the older generation working diligently and efficiently. So, it behooves on all of us, not only physicians but others as well, to protect the geriatric population, and help maintain their health, so they can continue their energetic lifestyle, age gracefully and not become disabled.

Geriatrics as a branch of medical science first originated in England and the country started creating special geriatric wards to house the older patients in major hospitals and training internal medicine physicians to take care of their special needs. This certainly helped to offer proper treatment, follow-up and subsequently long-term care and comfort as the patients approached their last days. Now, geriatric medicine has become an established specialty of its own in the U.S, as well. The study of geriatrics will impact on many other disciplines and hence a good Geriatric Handbook will serve as a useful instruction manual as well as a great reference source.

Dr. Venkit Iyer’s new book, “A Handbook of Geriatrics,” is a timely publication that gives details of all the common illnesses that affect the elderly population and appropriate management for each disease. It’s a true primer in geriatrics.

The book is organized into five well defined sections, each one devoted to a special aspect of diagnosis and management of acute and chronic illnesses as well as preventive care, and finally, compassionate care as the patient reaches his/ her final days. Salient features of history and physical examination of the older patient with multiple medical and often some mental problems, are emphasized. What is helpful for medical students, residents as well as the practicing physicians is the way the entire book is presented as “symptom-based approach” for the many illnesses they suffer from. The physician can carry the book with him/her for quick reference while going about seeing patients. For example, whether a patient presented with constipation or difficulty in swallowing or had an episode of memory loss, one can quickly refer to that symptom description in the book and get a feel for how to steer your work-up and get the right answers. Of course, once you study the book well, you’ll have a good idea about how to proceed, but is a ready reference, so no indications of the patient will leave you stumped.

Another salient feature is a list of medications with dosages incorporated in various sections and chapters. This will be a handy reference to the readers as they go through those portions. In addition to description, diagnostic work-up and management of various geriatric illnesses, the authors have added additional chapters that deal with ‘Dietary recommendations,’ ‘Exercise to keep the body fit and healthy,’ ‘Stress Reduction and Spirituality,’ ‘Medical Benefits of Yoga’ and more. Also included are the much-needed chapters on ‘Palliative Care,’ ‘Long-Term Care’ and ‘Hospice Care.’ Every practicing physician should read the book for use as a ready reference. It would make an excellent addition to any medical, nursing or hospital library. And it promises to be a leading reference source in the field of geriatric care.



“Mattress Makers” (106 pages; \$20.95) by Sasenarine Persaud; published by Mawenzi House (www.mawenzihouse.com)

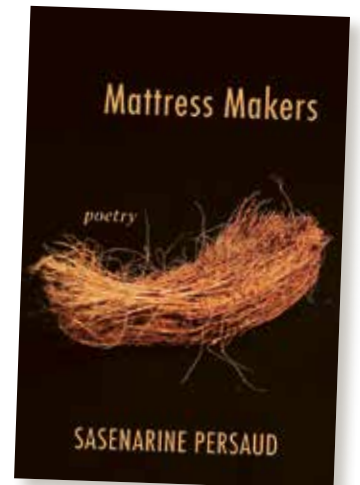
By NITISH S. RELE – editor@khaasbaat.com

After a five-year hiatus, Sasenarine Persaud is back with another gem of a poetry collection, “Mattress Makers.” The Indo-Caribbean and Indo-South American poet is all over the place: from reggae to Bollywood to Indian

classical-ragic music, Thanksgiving to Diwali, and along the way, pays tributes to noted writers V.S. Naipaul, Peter Nazareth and Sam Selvon.

Here’s a relevant poem as we approach the Festival of Lights -- “Diwali: Sailing from India:”

We fled west “following the Light of the sun.” No land in sight flapping sails a monotonous song. Board on deck—if we could find some curry leaves, any leaves in troughs, waves as tall as masks --canvas or cotton—a bird, two branches in the tide at sunset turmeric clouds turmeric leaves glowing and fencing light—you turn away hustling to your berth—no word for such swaying hips in cypresses on far shoreline tomorrow, elsewhere in the dawn sand and sun and land O land O land tonight we light our diya—earthen vessel, barge, boat, laden with oil an unextinguished flame whispering a prayer to Lakshmi”



And then there is the beautifully-written tribute, “Memoriam for V.S.N.” to the Nobel Prize winner in Literature. Here is a portion of the poem:

“Like bread dough twice again and fired in a tandoor—a writer must be fit to write to think through fogs, English mists and cold and damp--in fiction you’re God Only so many times creating mainly dust and dirt And darkness and dictators and yourself transposed, your handful of dust quoting Jagan’s vanity and the “kabaka”—ruler-for-life— In Georgetown did you ever see Chedi in action, humbled—ahir, cow-minder progeny like Krishna in jail. Kamsa is everywhere And that flute’s miracles—there is no good Way to say: we celebrate your accomplishments despising the person, untrusting the teller”

A native of Guyana, Persaud who resides in New Tampa, is an author of 15 books of fiction and poetry. He worked as a writer in Canada before moving to the United States. Among his awards include the K M Hunter Foundation Award, the Arthur Schomburg Award and fellowships/scholarships from the University of Miami and Boston University. This is another must-read collection by Persaud who terms his aesthetics “Yogic Realism.”



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Test-drive stories by NITISH S. RELE motoringtampabay@gmail.com



In 2022, Subaru sold a record 155,142 Crosstreks, making the compact SUV its fastest-selling vehicle in history since debuting over a decade ago. This year and beyond, we can bet more records will be broken by the totally redesigned ride.

Though it retains the engine, transmission and other mechanical components, the third-gen Crosstrek is like an almost-new SUV. Under the hood resides a 2.5-liter 4-cylinder BOXER engine developing 182 horsepower @ 5800 rpm and 178 pounds-feet of torque @ 3700 rpm. It is mated to a continuous variable transmission with 8-speed manual mode and option of steering-wheel paddle shifters. The four-wheel independent MacPherson-type strut front and a double wishbone rear suspension soak up bumps and maintain stability in the standard and revised symmetrical all-wheel-drive ride. Borrowed from the WRX, and understandably so, is the dual-pinion electric power-assist steering, which promptly responds at the slightest turn. The X-Mode with hill descent control allows the driver to pick snow, dirt, deep snow and mud modes for any untoward road/weather conditions. And yes, we will take the 8.7-inch ground clearance any day. Our Sport trim screamed yellow inside and out! Up front, the new frameless hexagonal grille in black finish is flanked by LED steering-responsive headlights but easily noticeable are also yellow accents on front, sides and rear panels. Step into the sizeable cabin and your eyes quickly glance at yellow tones on the gray cloth seats, leather-wrapped steering wheel, door armrests, center console storage lid, and shifter handle, and carbon fiber trim. Even the instrument cluster rings are illuminated in creamy metallic finish! Another welcome new addition is the huge 11.6-inch tablet-



CROSSTREK SPORT

Tires: 225/55R18
Wheelbase: 105.1 inches
Length: 176.4 inches
Width: 70.9 inches
Height: 63 inches
Weight: 3,332 pounds
Fuel capacity: 16.6 gallons
City: 26 mpg; highway, 33 mpg
Base price: \$28,995
Price as tested: \$32,210
Web site: www.subaru.com

style touch screen (first for Crosstrek) to control navigation, audio and phone along with circular knobs. The 60/40-split rear-seat passengers have plenty of room to stretch their legs. Go for the optional \$1,920 blind spot detection/rear cross traffic alert system, power moon roof and 10-way power driver seat. It is money well spent. Also standard are heated front seats, dual auto a/c, 4.2-inch instrument cluster, six speakers, retractable cargo cover, push-button start and a wireless phone charger.

Whether you are an off-roader or not, the revamped Crosstrek will serve the purpose. Plus, the drive off the fuel pump won't be as painful (combined 29 mpg) and neither will the price tag in the early 30s. If in the market for a compact SUV that appears cool, attractive, nimble and sophisticated, grab any from a local dealer's lot before it's too late. This is one "ride" you don't want to miss!

GAS-SIPPER KIA NIRO PHEV GOES THE DISTANCE ... AND SOME MORE!

The second-generation Kia Niro is here and it can travel a much farther distance than before. Our PHEV (Plug-in hybrid electric vehicle) enables the five-passenger compact crossover to now go 33 miles (previously it was only 26) without using gas. The charge port, located in the driver's side front fender, uses a 240-volt system that can take about three hours or a 120-volt consuming nine hours. You can effectively go well over 500 miles on a tank (9.7 gallons) with its gas, hybrid and plug-in electric features.

A 1.6-liter, 4-cylinder gasoline engine is mated to an electric motor, which is powered by an 11.1 kWh (previous was 8.9) lithium-ion polymer battery weighing 245 pounds. That is adequate enough to put out a total of 180 horsepower and 195 pounds-feet of torque while paired to a laudable 6-speed dual clutch transmission. The crossover offers a regenerative braking system for additional fuel savings. When the ride is coasting or the brakes are applied, the electric power functions as a generator, capturing kinetic energy that would normally be lost as heat through the brakes. Instead, it converts the energy into useable electricity for recharging the battery.

A boost in wheelbase, length and width opens up more cabin and cargo space, i.e., 22.8 cubic feet behind the second-row seat. The signature "tiger nose" grille meets up with LED headlights and fog lamps to create a sleek and eye-striking appearance. Black door cladding and wheel arches are a standout also. Two 19.2-inch screens, one for the digital instrument cluster (cool LCD hybrid gauge showing charge, eco and power readings, as well as EV mode) and the other for infotainment, float to sync as one. Standard amenities include 10-way power heated/cooled driver and six-way manual passenger seats, leather steering wheel, dual auto a/c, power tilt/telescopic sun roof, aluminum pedals, 8-speaker Harman Kardon audio and push-button start. A rotary dial serves as the transmission

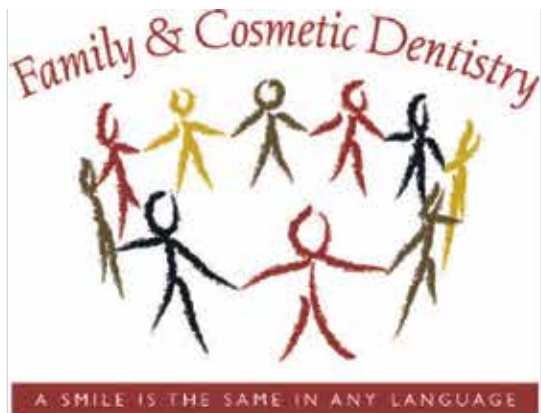


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Width: 71.8 inches
Height: 60.8 inches
Suspension: MacPherson strut front, multilink rear
Steering: motor-driven power assist
Weight: 3,336 pounds
Gas only: 48 mpg
Comb electric/gas: 108 MPGe
Base price: \$39,490
Price as tested: \$41,635
Web site: www.kiausa.com

shifter. The 60/40 rear seat folds down to open up 54.6 cubic feet of space. Kia should be commended for offering several standard safety features, which are optional in competitor vehicles. Some are dual front and side airbags, side curtain airbag for both rows, driver knee airbag, rearview camera, lane keep/follow and forward-collision-avoid assists, blind spot and rear-cross traffic collision warnings, four-wheel antilock brakes, rollover sensor, electronic stability and traction control, smart cruise control and a tire pressure monitoring system.

It may not have loads of power (sport mode is offered) but the Niro is an outstanding gas/electric/plug-in hybrid effort from Kia. It is sharp-looking, sporty, practical and sips gas (we averaged over 50 mpg). That it comes with a 10-year or 100,000-mile power train and a five-year or 60,000-mile basic warranty is a plus. Let's not forget, the lithium-ion battery is also covered for 10-year/100,000 miles.



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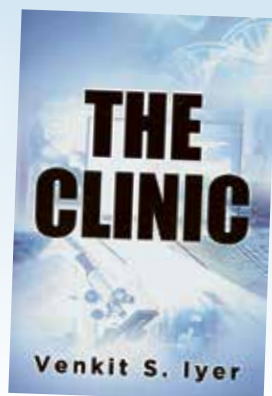
THE CLINIC

by Venkit S. Iyer, MD, MS, FACS, FRCS-C




Dr. Venkit S. Iyer

A fertility clinic, a genetic research laboratory, and a dark website collaborate to assist in reproductive needs, genetic manipulations, and human experimentations done in high secrecy. Scientists want to explore and experiment, while clients demand cutting-edge technology to satisfy their interests. Medical technology keeps advancing steadily and is looking towards reaching goals that were unthinkable a few years ago. This fictional medical thriller will take you through futuristic possibilities for the human race.



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Cont'd from page 1

TAMPA/PINELLAS PARK/SEFFNER

Sanatan Mandir in Tampa will hold Deepawali Laxmi Puja from 6 p.m. on Nov. 12. Annakut will be the next day from 6:30 to 8 p.m. The mandir is at 311 E. Palm Ave. For information, call (813) 221-4482 or visit www.sanatanmandirtampa.org

Ambaji Mandir at 10991 58th St., in Pinellas Park, will hold Diwali celebration from 5:30 p.m. Nov. 12. New Year Annakut will be from 5:30 p.m. Nov. 14. Dev Diwali will be from 6 on Nov. 26. For more information, call the mandir at (727) 388-6685 or visit www.ambajimandir.com

Laxmi Narayan Mandir, 4615 George Road, Tampa, will hold Diwali celebration from 5:30 p.m. Nov. 12. New Year Annakut will be from 5:30 p.m. Nov. 14. Dev Diwali will be from 6 on Nov. 26. For information, call (813) 444-9786.

Hindu Temple of Florida in Tampa will hold its annual Diwali celebrations on Nov. 12 with Lakshmi Pooja at 7 p.m. followed by fireworks for children at 5509 Lynn Road, Tampa. For information, call (813) 962-6890 or visit <https://www.htfl.org/>

BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir will hold Diwali (Chopda Pujan) from 10 a.m. Nov. 12. Kids Diwali celebration will be from 1 p.m. the same day. Annakut/ New Year will be on Nov. 13 from noon to 7 p.m. with aarti every hour. Mahaprasad will be served. BAPS is at 9556 E. Fowler Ave. in Thonotosassa. For details, call (813) 986-5473.

Maayboli Melawa Tampa Bay (MMTB), a not-for-profit organization for promoting Marathi culture, will celebrate Diwali from 5 p.m. on Nov. 18 at St. Joseph Syro-Malabar Catholic Church, 5501 Williams Road, Seffner. MMTB members are free; non-members pay \$30. For more information, visit www.mmtbusa.org

SOUTH FLORIDA

WEST PALM BEACH: And the **Palm Beach India Association** will hold a Diwali Show from 4 p.m. on Nov. 19 at Hilton Palm Beach Airport, 150 Australian Ave., West Palm Beach. The event is free for members, \$75 non-members. For details, visit www.gopbia.org or email info@gopbia.org

BOYNTON BEACH/MIAMI: **BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir**, 541 S.E. 18th Ave., Boynton Beach will hold Kids Diwali from 3 p.m. Nov. 11 and Chopda Pujan from 4 on Nov. 12. Annakut Darshan will be on Nov. 13 from noon. For information, call (561) 740 2898.

ORLANDO/CASSELBERRY

Gujarati Society of Central Florida will hold Diwali Celebration 2023 from 5 p.m. on Saturday, Nov. 4, at Caribe Royale, 8101 World Center Drive, Orlando. Festivities include variety of foods, cash bar, musical group from India, kids programs. Cost is \$75 for members, \$100 non-members. For information, visit www.gujaratisocietycfl.com

JACKSONVILLE/ST. AUGUSTINE

Indian Cultural Society of Jacksonville will hold its Diwali celebration from 2 p.m. on Nov. 18 at The St. Augustine Amphitheatre, 1340C A1A S, St. Augustine. This is a ICS member-only event. There will be food, performances and vendors. For information, email info@jaxics.org or visit www.jaxics.org

Gujarati Samaj of North East Florida will present Patel Brothers Diwali 2023 from 4 p.m. Nov. 11 at Renaissance World Golf Village, 500 S. Legacy Trail, St. Augustine. Local children will present folk and Bollywood performances followed with entertainment by a live group. A buffet-style Punjabi dinner will be served. Tickets are \$15 per person (VIP \$35), non-members \$50 (VIP \$70). Purchase tickets at <https://gsnef.ticketleap.com/patel-brother-diwali-2023/>

BARTOW/WINTER HAVEN/LAKELAND

Bhartiya Samaj of Central Florida will celebrate Diwali at 6 p.m. on Nov. 19 at Bartow Civic Center, 2250 S. Florida Ave., Bartow. For information, call Subhash Patel at (863) 838-0969 or visit www.bscl.com

Shree Swaminarayan Hindu

Temple (ISSO), 2793 New Tampa Highway, Lakeland, will celebrate New Year all day from 6 a.m. Nov. 14. Diwali Annakut will be from 3 to 9 p.m. Nov. 18. Tulsi Vivah will be 2 to 8 p.m. Dec. 2. For information, call (863) 687-4776 or visit www.issolakeland.org

OCALA

India Association Cultural & Educational Center will celebrate Diwali from 6 p.m. Nov. 18 at 2030 N.E. 36th Ave. For details, call (352) 575-1111 or visit indiaocala.org

Strategic Community Alliance will hold Diwali festival from 11:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. in Citizens' Circle, downtown Ocala on Nov. 19. The free event will feature Indian dance, music, fashion show, saree experience, trivia quiz; arts and crafts, food vendors. For details, visit <https://scacommunities.org/>

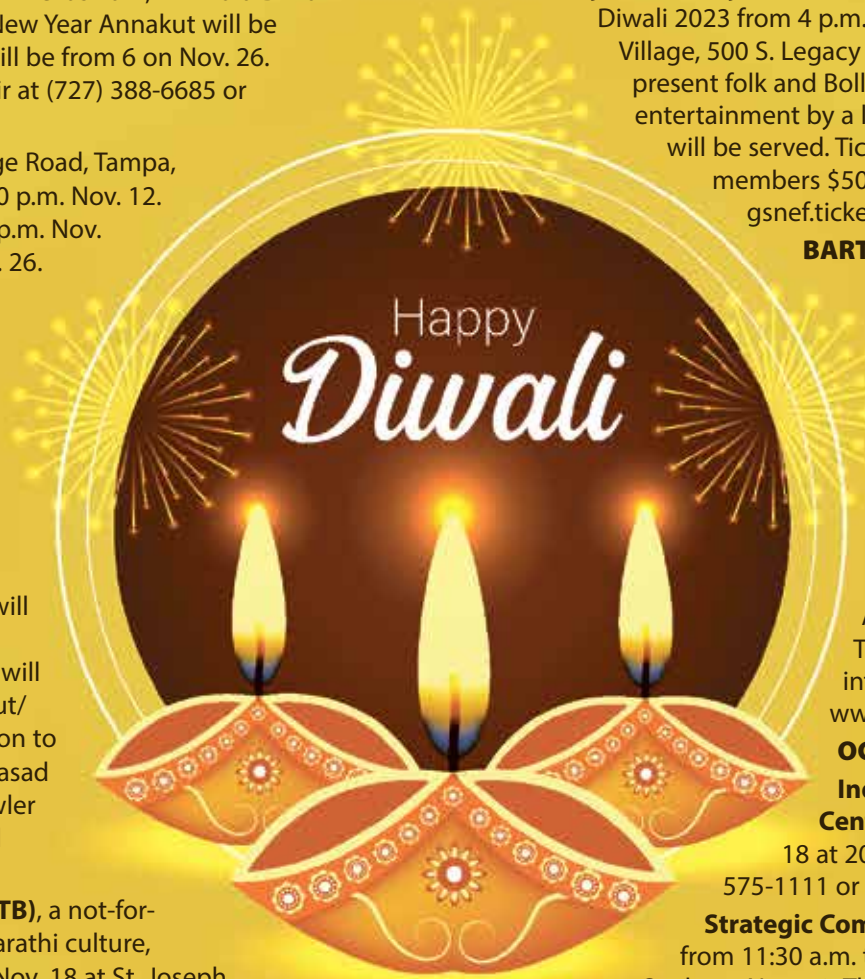
NAPLES

India Association of Naples will celebrate Diwali with dinner, entertainment and fireworks from 6 to 10 p.m. on Saturday, Nov. 18 at Parish Hall, St. Agnes Church, 7775 Vanderbilt Beach Road. Members are discounted at \$20 for teens and adults; non-members pay \$50 for teens and adults and \$20 for kids 6-12 years; advanced ticket purchase required; for details, email naplesindia@gmail.com

MELBOURNE/VIERA (SPACE COAST)

Indian Association of the Space Coast will hold Diwali Night on Nov. 18 at St. John the Evangelist Catholic Community, 5655 Stadium Parkway, Viera. Performers will be Sanjay More and the Rang Rasiya group. For details, call (321) 271-7072 or visit <https://myiasc.com/>

Manav Mandir will hold Diwali celebrations (Laxmi Puja, fireworks) at 5 p.m. on Nov. 12 and Annakut Utsav the next day. The temple is at 7400 Waelti Drive, Melbourne. For information, (321) 426-0668 or visit www.mmbrevard.org





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VISA RENEWALS, EADS, H-1B

By **DILIP PATEL**



I am pleased to submit this article for the Diwali and India Festival issue and wish everyone a very Happy Diwali. This month, I provide an update on three items of interest relevant to our readers.

Visa renewals by mail within USA

Currently, only U.S. consulates abroad are able to issue visas to noncitizens who want to travel to the USA. This was not always the case. Prior to 2004, holders of E, H, L and P visas maintaining status in the U.S. were able to renew their visas by mailing the applications to the U.S.

Department of State in Washington, D.C. – a process referred to as “stateside processing of visa renewals.” Stateside processing ended in 2004, primarily because of increased security requirements and the lack of capacity to process fingerprint checks. As a result of the global COVID-19 pandemic and other conditions, visa processing at consulates abroad experienced significant problems and delays. Many organizations suggested the reintroduction of stateside visa renewals as a way of addressing some of the delays by reducing the number of applicants at the consulate.

In early 2003, there were reports from the State Department that they were planning to reintroduce stateside visa processing. This created a lot of excitement – especially among Indian citizens with H or L status in the U.S. The excitement waned because there appeared to be no progress in sight. Finally, on Oct. 17, 2023, the Department of State sent to the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, a draft for a notice entitled, “Pilot Program to Resume Renewal of H-1B Nonimmigrant Visas in the United States for Certain Qualified Noncitizens.” The actual document is not yet available to the public, so full details are not available. The information currently available indicates that the program will not begin until early 2024. DOS officials have indicated that it will initially be limited only to 20,000 H-1B principals who would be otherwise eligible for the interview waiver process at their home consulate. Citizens of India will be eligible to participate in the pilot program. DOS has expressed its strong intent to expand this program after the initial launch has allowed them to work out any operational issues. Something to look forward to in 2024.

Automatic extension for EADs reduced to 180 days

Some foreign nationals are eligible to apply for and receive employment authorization from USCIS, evidenced by an Employment Authorization Document (EAD). Each EAD contains a code reflecting the provision of law under which it was issued. Some common examples of persons eligible to apply for and receive the EAD are applications for Adjustment of Status (code (c)(9)); H-4 Spouses of H-1B with approved I-140 petitions (code (c)(26); TPS (a)(9); Asylum Pending (c)(8); and, Asylum approved (a)(5).

Each EAD is issued with an expiration date and the holder would have to apply for an extension or renewal if still eligible. The renewal application can be filed 120 days in advance of the expiration date. A frequently encountered problem was that USCIS was slow in processing and issuing the renewed EAD causing the employment authorization to expire until the new card was issued. Normally, for eligible EAD renewals, DHS regulations provided for an automatic extension period of up to 180 days from the expiration date stated on the EAD. However, USCIS processing times began to exceed 180 days; so, in May 2022, USCIS published a temporary rule, which provided for the automatic extension to be 540 days from the expiration date stated on the card. That temporary rule expired on Oct. 26, 2023, and going forward, for applications filed after that date, the automatic extension is reset to 180 days.

On the good news front, on Sept. 27, 2023, USCIS announced that the validity period for EAD’s issued to asylees and refugees, noncitizens granted withholding of deportation or removal, noncitizens with pending applications for asylum or withholding of removal, and noncitizens with pending applications for adjustment of status would be increased from the maximum of two years to five years. We have now started to receive C9 EAD’s valid for five years. Hopefully, this will significantly reduce the number of applicants who need to file renewals.

USCIS proposed rule to amend H-1B regulations.

On Oct. 20, 2023, DHS announced the publication of a proposed rule to modernize the H-1B program. Public comments would be accepted until Dec. 22, 2023. One highlight of the proposal is to change the selection process for the H-1B lottery. Instead of selecting by registration, USCIS would select by unique beneficiary, thereby reducing the potential for gaming the process to increase chances for selection and helping ensure that each beneficiary would have the same chance of being selected, regardless of how many registrations are submitted on their behalf. For example, in March 2023, there were 483,927 registrations, but of those, 176,444 were for individuals registered by more than one prospective employer. One individual actually had 83 employers submit registrations for them. The proposed rule would allow each beneficiary to be selected only once; if a beneficiary holds multiple registrations, each registering company would be notified of selection and provided an opportunity to file a legitimate H-1B petition on the beneficiary’s behalf. The proposed rule will also enhance penalties for those who abuse the lottery system. We will provide more details once the rule is finalized and implemented.

Dilip Patel of Buchanan Ingersoll & Rooney PC, a board-certified expert on immigration law, can be reached at (813) 222-1120 or email dilip.patel@bipc.com

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BENZ INTRODUCES AN IMPOSING PLUG-IN HYBRID GLE450E

Test-drive stories by NITISH S. RELE motoringtampabay@gmail.com

Fitting it between the smaller GLC and the bigger GLS, the GLE is a wonderful blend of power and sophistication that offers spice and entertainment both on and off-road. And for 2024, it gets an impressive all-new plug-in hybrid edition, GLE450e.

Under the hood of the five-seater 4Matic (all-wheel drive) SUV sits a 2.0-liter inline-4 turbo and intercooled engine cranking out a combined 381 horsepower and 479 pounds-feet of torque. It is complemented by a synchronous motor powered by a 23.3-kWh lithium-ion battery. Plug it in for a charge and you can essentially go up to 40 miles on battery alone. This is no speedster but 0 to 60 in 5.8 seconds and top speed of 130 mph is no small feat! Power reaches all four wheels via a meaty, crispy and accurate 9-speed auto gearbox. The independent double-wishbone front and multilink rear suspension with coil springs works well to absorb unpleasant bumps and sudden turns on the road. Handling and steering feel were good overall, thanks to the electro-mechanical rack-and-pinion. Tow capacity for the steel unibody structure is admirable at 7,700 pounds.

Up front, the face is instantly recognizable as a Benz, highlighted by two horizontal chrome-accented louvres crisscrossing a radiator grille with the familiar three-pointed star emblem. Power domes on the bulging hood meet up with horizontal LED headlights to convey an attractive stance. Space is ample in both rows and the dashboard and center console is complemented by alluring wood and lush leather to give the SUV a classy feel. A touchpad controls the audio, nav and phone infotainment on the massive 12.3-inch screen, also similar in size to the digital instrument cluster. A personal infotainment system or the MBUX

(Mercedes-Benz User Experience), works through voice, touch and even hand gestures (just say, Hey Mercedes!). It can't get any more intuitive and personal for new Benz owners! Other creature comforts include dual auto a/c, power/tilt slide moon roof, 10-way power front heated seats, 40/20/40 fold rear seat, wireless Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, and copious aluminum and chrome accents. Loaded with tech- and infotain-laden features, the GLE450e delivers performance and class that's matchless for the money. The plug-in feature makes the vehicle even more desirable for daily short commute drivers. You will be hard-pressed to find a midsize luxury SUV that will pay heed to your command (Hey Mercedes!) as you experience the outstanding ride.



BENZ GLE450e

Tires: 255/50R19
Wheelbase: 117.9 inches
Length: 194.3 inches
Height: 70.7 inches
Width: 76.7 inches
Weight: 5,754 pounds
Fuel capacity: 22.5 gallons
Combined city/hwy: 24 mpg
Electric + gas: 58 MPGe
Base price: \$69,500
Price as tested: \$86,770
Web site: www.mbusa.com

2023 HYUNDAI ELANTRA HEV IS A REMARKABLE GAS-SIPPER

Yes, you can cut those trips to the gas station short, real short, as fuel prices hover around \$4 a gallon! All you have to do is go get a 2023 Hyundai Elantra HEV (hybrid electric vehicle). Believe us, you are assured of at least over 50 mpg in this fine compact sedan.

A 2.0-liter inline-4 cylinder engine puts out a total of 139 horsepower and 195 pounds-feet of torque while coupled to an electric motor operating a 32kW lithium-ion polymer battery. Power reaches the front wheels via a crisp-shifting 6-speed auto gearbox. By no means is this a speedster but the car takes off real quick and comes to a stop at a moment's notice. Switch to sport mode (normal and smart are other options) and you will end up with a sprightly drive whether on the highway or dodging peak-hour traffic. Suspension is handled via the reliable MacPherson strut front and multilink rear. The motor-driven power rack-and-pinion steering returns a weighted and response to the driver's input.

The small car portrays a low and wide stance with a dark chrome mesh grille flanked by slim, horizontal LED headlights and daytime running lights. Two colossal 10.25-inch displays: a touch screen for infotainment system, and the other for digital instrument cluster, immediately draws attention. Sporting a horizontal dash layout, the practical cabin comes standard with a 60/40 rear seat, leather-wrapped heated/cooled, six-way power driver and four-way front-passenger adjustable seats, dual auto a/c, tilt/telescopic steering column, Bose audio with eight speakers, power sun roof, wireless phone charger, electronic park brake and Android Auto/Apple CarPlay.



ELANTRA (HEV LIMITED)

Tires: P225/45R17
Wheelbase: 107.1 inches
Length: 184.1 inches
Width: 71.9 inches
Height: 55.7 inches
Weight: 3,069 pounds
Fuel capacity: 11 gallons
City: 49 mpg
Highway: 52 mpg
Combined: 50 mpg
Web site: www.hyundaiusa.com

Several safety features come at no extra cost. There are dual front and side airbags, side curtain airbag, four-wheel antilock brakes with electronic brake distribution and brake assist, front/rear crumple zones, electronic stability and traction control, forward-, blind spot- and rear cross traffic collision- avoidance assists, lane keep and forward assists, rearview camera, remote keyless entry and tire pressure monitoring system.

Base-priced at just \$29,150, the Elantra HEV makes perfect sense as we see no end in sight for rising fuel prices at the pump. Apart from its gas-sipping capabilities, the car is agile, delightful and fun to drive. There also is Hyundai's five-year, 60,000-mile basic, and 10-year, 100,000-mile power train and hybrid battery warranties to convince you to sign on the dotted line.

PALM HARBOR CHAMBER HONORS SHAN SHIKARPURI WITH LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD



Roshan "Shan" Shikarpuri was honored with a Lifetime Achievement Award by the Palm Harbor Chamber of Commerce and the chamber's foundation on Sept. 28 in Clearwater. Only a few selected recipients have received the prestigious award.

"I have received many awards and honors but this award is special to me because it is coming from local businesses and civic leaders and I am truly honored," said Shikarpuri, an entrepreneur and the founding member of Shan Shikarpuri & Associates, PA. He has received numerous state, regional, county and local awards

as a professional, businessman and community leader, including Honorary Mayor of Palm Harbor and Palm Harbor Citizen of the Year.

Some of his awards and honors include the Florida Outstanding CPA in Public Service Award from the Florida Institute of CPAs (FICPA). Moreover, he was acknowledged for and received the Chapter Champion "Makes a Difference" Award from the FICPA Foundation and was also given the "Most Influential Member" Award by the Suncoast Chapter of FICPA.

He has been recognized for Outstanding Services by the St. Petersburg College Foundation, and for Outstanding Contributions and Support from the INDO-US Chamber of Commerce.

Shikarpuri earned his graduate and undergraduate degrees from Florida State University, is a member of AICPA and FICPA, and a Fellow Member of the FICPA Foundation



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TAX PLANNING

THE INS AND OUTS OF HOME OFFICE DEDUCTION

By **TEJAL DHRUVE**



The pandemic changed the landscape of work for a lot of people, including the numerous business owners who began running businesses from their homes. Many are still working from their home offices, whether full-time or on a hybrid basis. If you're self-employed and run a business from home or perform certain functions there, you might be able to claim deductions for home office expenses against any business income.

How to Qualify

In general, self-employed taxpayers qualify for home office deductions if part of their home is used "regularly and exclusively" as the principal place of business. If your home isn't your principal place of business, you may still be able to deduct home office expenses if:

You physically meet with patients, clients or customers on your premises, or;
You use a storage area in your home (or a separate free-standing structure, such as a garage) exclusively and regularly for business.

Keep in mind the requirement that the space be used exclusively for business. For example, if your home office is also a guest bedroom, you can't deduct the entire space as a home office expense. But if you use the desk area of the room exclusively for business, you can deduct that portion of the room, as long as you otherwise qualify.

Expenses You Can Deduct

Many eligible taxpayers deduct actual expenses when they claim home office deductions. Deductible home office expenses may include:

Direct expenses, such as the cost of painting and carpeting a room used exclusively for business;
A proportionate share of indirect expenses, including mortgage interest, rent, property taxes, utilities, repairs and insurance, and depreciation.
But keeping track of actual expenses can take time, and it requires organized recordkeeping.

The Simpler Method

Fortunately, there's a simplified method: You can deduct \$5 for each square foot of home office space, up to \$1,500. The cap can make the simplified method less valuable for larger home office spaces. Even for small spaces, taxpayers may qualify for bigger deductions using the actual expense method. So, tracking your actual expenses can be worth it.

When claiming home office deductions, you're not stuck with a particular method. For instance, you might have chosen the actual expense method when you filed your 2022 return, but then use the simplified method when you file your 2023 return next year, and the following year switch back to the actual expense method. The choice is yours.

More Considerations

The amount of your deductions is subject to limitations based on the income attributable to your use of the office. Other rules and limitations may apply. But eligible home office expenses that can't be deducted because of these limitations can be carried forward and may be able to be deducted in later years.

Also be aware that, if you sell a home on which you claimed home office deductions, there may be tax implications.

A Valuable Deduction

You might be wondering why only business owners and the self-employed have been addressed here. Unfortunately, the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act suspended home office deductions from 2018 through 2025 for employees, even if you're currently working from home because your employer doesn't provide office space.

But the home office deduction can be valuable to those who're eligible for it. We can help you determine if you're eligible and the best method for claiming the deduction in your situation.

Tejal Dhruve, CPA, LLC, a full-service tax and wealth management firm with offices in Wesley Chapel, Florida, and Dublin, Ohio, can be reached at (614) 742-7158 or email info@dhruvecpa.com



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NOVEMBER FORECAST

By PANKAJ KOHLI



ARIES / Mesha (Fire sign, ruling planet is Mars) - (March 21-April 20) Mars Sign – Stars covered Ashwini, Bharani, Kritika (1st Part) Environmental and economic conditions look favorable, Fortunes may shine. Change in profession is likely. Business travel could bring positive results. Rich gains and all-round happiness cannot be ruled out. Time flies fast; a minute lost cannot be recovered.

TAURUS / Vrushabha (Earthen sign, ruling planet is Venus) - (April 21-May 21) Venus Sign - Stars covered Kritika (last 3 parts), Rohini, Mrigashira (first 2 parts)

Your sign lord, Venus, looks promising especially in the house of achievement, success and gains. This yoga is specially noted for financial success and splendid returns. Fortunately, Rahu and Ketu, both malefic are transiting through beneficial signs. Foes may turn into friends. Put ideas into action for encouraging results.

GEMINI / Mithuna (Air sign, ruling planet is Mercury) - (May 22-June 21) Mercury Sign - Stars covered Mrigashira (last 2 parts), Ardra & Punarvasu (first

3 parts) Your sign lord, Mercury is transiting kindly. This means Intellectual faculties are fully operational. Some of you may have full clarity of thought and be blessed with divine powers. In short, a highly satisfactory time and remember, the wheel of fortune keeps on rotating constantly. Now, the focus is upon your sign.

CANCER / Kataka (Watery sign, ruling planet is Moon) - (June 22-July 22) Moon Sign – Stars covered Punarvasu (4th part), Pushya, Aslesha Your ruler, Moon, combines with many good planets and transits through satisfactory positions. Your imagination can take you to higher planes. It is a positive time, and some of you may find favorable solutions to problems. You are gaining strength day by day. Opportunities might knock at your door. Realize the truth and seize opportunities.

LEO / Simha (Fire sign, ruling planet is Sun) - (July 23-Aug. 22) Sun Sign – Stars covered Magha, Purva Phalguni, Uttara Phalguni (1st part) Jupiter position in Martian house is placed in highly constructive position. This is doubly advantageous for your virtues to shine, providing ample opportunities to further chances both in the material as well as spiritual spheres. Sun, your sign lord, is transiting through a positive time.

VIRGO / Kanya (Earthen sign, ruling planet is Mercury) (Aug. 23-Sept. 22) Mercury Sign – Stars covered Uttara Phalguni (last 3 parts, Hasta, Chitra (first 2 parts) “Let your intelligence guide, it will never fail you.” Some may have full command of personal matters. Time is suitable for self-promotion, do not ignore it! Friendly assistance, promising circumstances and monetary benefits – all are due. You are advised not to miss any opportunity.

LIBRA / Tula (Air sign, ruling planet is Venus) - (Sept. 23-Oct. 23) Venus Sign – Stars covered Chitra (last 2 parts), Swati, Vishakha (first 3 parts) Your sign lord, Venus, is favorably placed. Use your analytical mind; think of the pros and cons; adopt methodical procedure; keep your voice cool and calm. You can turn every minute to your benefit. Time flies fast; a minute lost cannot be recovered.

SCORPIO / Vruschika (Water sign, ruling planet is Mars) - (Oct. 24-Nov. 22) Mars Sign – Stars covered Vishakha (4th part), Anuradha, Jyestha Scorpions have high enthusiastic spirits and boosted energies. Winning time persists. The transit of sign lord brings domestic happiness, positive financial prospects. Rich gains can be expected for some. Your social circle will be effective. Some may be rewarded suitably for hard labor, rewarding amply.

SAGITTARIUS / Dhanush (Fire sign, ruling planet is Jupiter) - (Nov. 23-Dec. 21) Jupiter Sign – Stars covered Moola, Purva Shada, Uttara Shada (first part) Your sign lord is placed happily, in sign of achievement, success and gains. Rewards through transactions may be expected. Minor obstacles are also seen. Be alert and move with caution while dealing with large projects and expansion schemes.

CAPRICORN / Makara (Earthen sign, ruling planet is Saturn) - (Dec. 22-Jan. 20) Saturn Sign – Stars covered Uttara Shada (last 3 parts) Shravana, Dhanishta (first 2 parts) Gain in dealings, professional upliftment as well as elevation in position may be seen. Business dealings could be rewarding. Economic conditions look well-balanced. Overall, it is a cheerful month for many. However, health problems are likely.

AQUARIUS / Kumbha (Air sign, ruling planet is Saturn) – (Jan. 21-Feb. 19) Saturn Sign - Stars covered: Dhanishta (last 2 parts) Satabhisha, Purva Bhadra Pada (1st 3 parts) Your planetary lord concerning fortune, profession and gains looks to be well-placed. Make the best use of it. Your intuitive powers are working well. Natives with strong charts may act accordingly for a winning result. Appreciable development cannot be ruled out in spiritual aspects too.

PISCES / Meena (Water sign, ruling planet is Jupiter) - (Feb. 20-March 20) Jupiter Sign - Stars covered: Purva Bhadra Pada (last part) Uttara Bhadra Pada, Revathi Productive time continues. Complete pending jobs now. Your houses of fortune, profession and gains are powerful and it is time for initiating expansion schemes. New sources will facilitate additional or unexpected income. Make the most of every minute.

For detailed horoscope analysis and chart reading, courtesy Pankaj-Astro Jyotish, call Pankaj Kohli at (905) 910-1441 or e-mail Pathofastrology@gmail.com

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EYE CARE

DIWALI EYE SAFETY: PROTECTING SIGHT DURING THE FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

By DR. ARUN GULANI



As the enchanting festival of Diwali approaches, the vibrant celebrations and dazzling fireworks become the focal point of the festivities. While Diwali is a time for joy and togetherness, it’s crucial to be mindful of potential eye safety hazards that accompany the grandeur of the annual event. In this article, we delve into the medical and health aspects of ensuring eye safety during the Festival of Lights.

Eye safety amidst the fireworks

The resplendent fireworks displays that light up the Diwali night sky are a sight to behold. However, they come with inherent risks to eye health. To protect your vision during these dazzling displays:

- Maintain a safe distance: It’s essential to stand at a safe distance from the fireworks to avoid potential eye injuries from flying debris.
- Wear protective eyewear: Certified safety glasses or goggles offer a robust defense against sparks and debris, significantly reducing the risk of eye injuries.
- Leave it to the experts: For those unfamiliar with handling fireworks, it is advisable to leave this to the experts or responsible adults who can ensure safe practices.
- Prompt medical attention: If an eye injury occurs due to fireworks, it’s crucial to rinse the eye gently with clean water and seek immediate medical attention. Avoid any rubbing or applying pressure to the injured eye.

Candle and diya safety

The traditional lighting of diyas and candles is a heartwarming Diwali tradition, but it’s essential to be cautious to prevent eye injuries:

- Secure placement: Ensure that diyas and candles are placed in stable containers to prevent accidental tipping, which could lead to burns or fires.
- Minimize fire hazards: Position diyas and candles away from flammable materials like curtains and tablecloths to reduce the risk of fires.
- Use candle holders: Candle holders not only add to the aesthetics but also prevent wax spills and the potential for burn injuries.
- Supervised use: Do not leave candles or diyas unattended, especially if children or pets are in the vicinity. Always extinguish them properly before leaving the area.

Air quality concerns

Diwali’s extensive use of fireworks can have significant consequences for air quality, indirectly affecting eye health. Smoke, dust and pollutants in the air can lead to eye irritation and discomfort.

- Limit outdoor exposure: During peak firework hours, consider reducing outdoor activities when air quality deteriorates.
- Air purification: The use of air purifiers can mitigate indoor air pollution, creating a safer environment for the eyes.
- Lubricating eye drops: Over-the-counter lubricating eye drops can provide relief from eye irritation caused by airborne pollutants.

Child eye safety

Children are particularly vulnerable to eye injuries during Diwali, given their curiosity and limited awareness of potential risks. Ensuring their eye safety is paramount:

- Constant supervision: Always closely supervise children around fireworks, candles and diyas to prevent accidents.
- Education: Educate your children about the potential dangers of fireworks and the importance of eye safety.
- Child-appropriate eye protection: Ensure that children participating in firework activities wear suitable eye protection that fits their age and size.

While Diwali is a time for celebration, safeguarding your vision should be a top priority. By adhering to these guidelines, you can ensure a Diwali that is not only joyful but also safe. Your eyes are precious and protecting them is essential. Celebrate responsibly, and may you have a safe and memorable Diwali!

Arun C. Gulani, M.D., M.S., is director and chief surgeon of Gulani Vision Institute in Jacksonville. He can be reached at gulanivision@gulani.com or visit www.gulanivision.com



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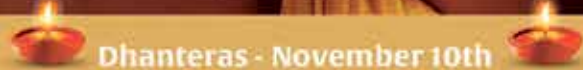


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