

KHAASBAAT



A PUBLICATION FOR INDIAN AMERICANS IN FLORIDA

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JANUARY 2025

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INDIA
REPUBLIC DAY

JANUARY 26

COMMUNITIES AROUND FLORIDA ARE HONORING INDIA'S 76TH REPUBLIC DAY.

Tampa Bay, South Florida, Orlando, Jacksonville, Fort Myers, Naples Celebrations:

SOUTH FLORIDA: THE INDIAN REGIONAL AND CULTURAL CENTER (IRCC) will commemorate Anand Bazaar – Lohri/Republic Day/Kite Flying all rolled into one – from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Sunday, Jan. 26. Venue is Miramar Regional Park (corporate shelter), 16801 Miramar Pkwy, Miramar. Kites and food will be available for sale. Youth club elections will also be held. For information on the event, e-mail board@irccflorida.com or visit <https://irccflorida.org/>

TAMPA BAY AREA: THE FEDERATION OF INDIA ASSOCIATIONS (FIA) OF TAMPA BAY will hold India's 76th Republic Day celebration on Sunday, Jan. 26, at India Cultural Center, 5511 Lynn Road, Tampa. The lively and free event attracting all age groups from the greater Tampa Bay region includes cultural programs, competitions in art, essay writing, chess, patriotic dress, music, rangoli and cooking; blood drive; food booths, clothing and jewelry stalls; India and U.S. flag hoisting; high school scholarships presentation; member organizations exhibits. For details to register and participate, visit <http://www.fiatampabay.org/> For details, see ad on page 9.

Cont'd on page 9

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celebrates
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Pongal/
Makar
Sankrant!
STORY, PAGE 10

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/CLEARWATER/ST. PETERSBURG

JAN. 1: GSTB SENIOR DAY; organized by Gujarati Samaj of Tampa Bay; India Cultural Center, 5511 Lynn Road, Tampa; 10:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.; \$10 for GSTB members, \$15 for non-members; lunch and entertainment; for information, call Mahesh Modha at (813) 476-1540.

JAN. 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.

JAN. 15: ICC SENIORS GET-TOGETHER; India Cultural Center, 5511 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 Nayi at (631) 560-2718 to receive details about seniors gathering every month; or call Mahesh Modha at (813) 476-1540.

JAN. 19: 5K WALK & RUN; in memory of Dr. Madhavi Sekharam; organized by FIA of Tampa Bay and National American Telugu Society (NATS); Al Lopez Park, 4810 N. Himes Ave., Tampa; 9 a.m.; for information, call Raju Ramaka at (813) 500-8732.

FEB. 8: EAST-WEST MUSIC AND DANCE FESTIVAL; organized by Shruti Foundation; 2 to 7 p.m.; Water Works Park, 1710 N. Highlands Ave., Tampa; free; multicultural event with music bands, dance performances, food, vendors; for information, call (813) 549-9288 or visit www.shrutifoundationtampa.org



SIGNIFICANT DATES

JAN. 6: GURU GOBIND SINGH SAHIB BIRTHDAY
JAN. 13-14: PONGAL/LOHRI/MAKAR SANKRANT
JAN. 26: INDIA REPUBLIC DAY

FEB. 21-23: 2nd ANNUAL SOUTH ASIAN INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL OF FLORIDA (SAIFFF); for details, visit www.saifff.org or call (312) 933-2251.

ORLANDO/CASSELBERRY

JAN. 18: HEALTH FAIR; presented by Central Florida Association of Physicians from the Indian Subcontinent (CAPI); Hindu Society of Central Florida, 1994 Lake Drive, Casselberry; 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.; free blood pressure, cholesterol checks, and more; to sponsor, call Neelima Katukuri at (313) 671-0574.

JAN. 25: INDIA DAY FAN FEST; Kia Center, 400 W. Church St., Orlando; 4 to 7 p.m.; pre-game festivities at Fan Fest, Indian food, on-court performances; Orlando Magic vs. Detroit Pistons; for tickets, visit <https://fevo-enterprise.com/event/Indiaday2025>

SOUTH FLORIDA (POMPAÑO BEACH)

FEB. 1: NAMASTE! presented by Akshaya Patra; Indian art/food festival; Pompano Beach Amphitheatre & Grounds, 1806 N.E. Sixth St., Pompano Beach; 11:30 a.m. to 8 p.m.; visit www.namastefl.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.



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| MONTHLY EVENTS | WEEKLY EVENTS |
|--|--|
| WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 1 (6:00 PM to 8:00 PM) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SHREE GANESH ATHARWARSHI PATH PARAYAN | EVERY MONDAY - 6:30 PM <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SHIV ABHISHEK AND PUJA |
| THURSDAY, JANUARY 9 (6:30 PM) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EKADASHI PUJA | EVERY TUESDAY - 7:00 PM <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SUNDERKAND PATH • HANUMAN CHALISA |
| SUNDAY, JANUARY 12 (6:00 PM) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ANNAPURNA KITCHEN GRAND OPENING • LOHRI CELEBRATION | EVERY THURSDAY - 7:00 PM <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ALL SADGURU & SHIRDI SAI BABA BHAJAN SATSANG |
| MONDAY, JANUARY 13 (6:00 PM) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LOHRI / SHAMBHARI PURNIMA JAYANTI | |
| TUESDAY, JANUARY 14 (6:00 PM) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MAKARSHANKRANTI | |
| THURSDAY, JANUARY 16 (6:00 PM) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GANESH CHATURTHI • HAVAN | |
| SUNDAY, JANUARY 26 (6:00 PM) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PERDOSH VRAT | |

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TRAVEL MEDICINE

By DR. VENKIT IYER, MD, FACS



The holiday season is here, and many people go for a vacation or a reunion, requiring a trip away from home. It is fun to get away and it feels equally good to come back. Many hidden dangers and risks exist in traveling and a certain amount of caution can ward them off. Every trip has inherent risks of mental and physical strain. There is excitement as well as anguish. Older adults are at higher risk because of pre-existing medical conditions along with diminished physiological reserve.

While we do not have reliable data on travel-related medical problems, we know that upper respiratory infections, gastrointestinal disorders and travel related injuries are the most common health problems noted by travelers. Venous thrombo-embolism and in-flight emergencies are well described.

Planning your trip: Time spent studying the itinerary, accommodation, activities and all other fine details are well worth to avoid surprises and disappointments. Whenever possible, take a non-stop flight to avoid missing connections, lost luggage and time. Flights are booked full these days. If one can afford it, a business-class ticket is well worth it, to make the trip more tolerable.

Understanding biorhythms: Disruption of your biorhythm is to be expected during travel. At home, we are used to a certain time schedule for body functions, from the time you get up to the time you go to sleep, time to eat, exercise, use of toilet, mental activities and so forth. These routines provide us with a level of comfort and security. All these routines and timings can be disrupted during a trip, throwing you into a state of inconvenience, anxiety and anguish. Mental preparedness is needed to overcome these disruptions. Change of climate, language, customs, hazards, crimes, unfamiliar surroundings are issues that can add to confusion.

Food: We want to try different cuisines, or we are forced to eat what is available during a trip. Food poisoning, allergies or intolerance are real possibilities. Hot, freshly cooked food is safer than cold preserved pre-made food. We tend to overeat during travel, especially from the buffet lines. We may drink alcohol and eat snacks or unhealthy foods more than our usual habits. Diarrhea, parasitic infestations, viral infections or indigestion are likely to occur. Hand washing or use of hand sanitizers are to be observed as best as possible. Drinking water as well as water for washing hands or bathing can be contaminated. Ice cubes may be made from contaminated water. Make sure one does not get dehydrated at same time.

Medications: One should carry all the prescription medications to last twice the number of days of travel in the hand-carry bag. They should not be kept inside the checked luggage, since the luggage can be lost or delayed. The medications should be taken at same time schedules as followed at home. In addition, one may carry medications to counteract allergic reactions, indigestion, diarrhea, pain, headache and a common oral antibiotic. It is a good idea to carry a written list of medications, allergies, medical problems and contact information in the handbag, in case of urgent help. Those with significant medical problems, especially cardio-pulmonary issues, should consult their

primary care physician as to the safety of undertaking the trip in the first place.

Safety: Injuries, falls or accidents can happen when you are in new environments and tours. Properly fitting walking shoes are needed for tours. Several of the old monuments, temples and historic sites have stone steps, deep slopes, rough pathways and insecure sections. Hallways and tunnels can be narrow, crowded and dark. Extra caution is to be taken while walking with slow and careful steps. Follow specific instructions by the tour guide/agency. Lack of handicapped access, hazards, lack of handlebars or handrails with steep stairways, slippery slopes, unfamiliar hotel rooms, cognitive impairment related to jetlag or sleeplessness, confusion in a hurried mode are factors that can cause injuries and stress. Mobile phones can cause distractions while texting, taking photos or selfies or making calls leading to falls and accidents.

Personal protection: Crowds can bring people into close contact with each other, resulting in airborne or touch-related infections. Masks, hand sanitizers and washable clothes are used as necessities. Watch for stampedes in congested walled-off pathways. Sunglasses, hats or head coverings will help to reduce direct sun exposure. Suntan lotions or insect repellents are sprayed as needed. Long sleeve shirts and pants will reduce personal contact and insect bites and thus lessen the chance of infections from mosquitoes, ticks and bugs.

Vaccinations: Different countries recommend vaccinations and prophylactic medications to avoid endemic infections. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is a good source to get specific information. In general, one should at least take flu vaccine, along with Covid booster a month ahead of the planned travel. Protections against malaria, yellow fever, hepatitis and rabies are recommended in certain countries. In India, there are many wandering stray dogs, cows and monkeys that can cause animal bites.

Blood clot in veins: Prevention of blood clot formation in calf veins is an important consideration, especially for those who are likely to sit in the same position for several hours, whether it be in an airplane or car. It would be beneficial to move around, stretch the legs and body and exercise the calf muscles every two hours. Those who have prior medical problems may take mild dose of anticoagulants or aspirin for further protection.

Medical insurance/assistance: It would be a good idea to investigate the medical facilities available in the place of visit, as well as the cost of care. Travel protection/insurance plans are of some help. Your own medical insurance plans may cover a portion too.

Public information on travel risks, and recommendations are available at wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel Please do enjoy your trip but use caution. Careful planning and preparation can make it a safe journey.

Dr. Venkit S. Iyer, MD, FACS, is a retired general and vascular surgeon. He has authored six books: "Decision making in clinical surgery" first and second editions; "Aging well and reaching beyond," "The Clinic," "Geriatrics Handbook" and "Iyer's story book for children." They are available through Amazon or from the author. His website venkitiyer.com has necessary links and contact information.

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MAJOR UPDATE: STATE DEPARTMENT REVAMPS J-1 EXCHANGE VISITOR SKILLS LIST TO EXPAND OPPORTUNITIES FOR GLOBAL TALENT

By **DILIP PATEL** and **KHUSHBU PATEL**



On Dec. 9, 2024, the U.S. Department of State issued major changes to its Exchange Visitor Skills List that significantly alter the landscape of the J-1 Exchange Visitor Program. This update removed nearly half of the countries previously listed, such as Brazil, China, India, South Korea and Indonesia, among others. As a result, citizens from these countries, with certain limitations, will no longer need to return home for two years after their J-1 program ends before they can apply for certain visas or U.S. permanent residency. This change opens up new opportunities for

J-1 visa holders, making the program much more appealing for foreign nationals looking to gain experience in the U.S.

1. Understanding the J-1 Visa and Its Restrictions

The J-1 Exchange Visitor Visa was designed to promote cultural and educational exchange between the U.S. and other countries. It includes a range of programs, including students, trainees, teachers, research scholars, physicians, specialists, au pairs, camp counselors and participants in the Summer Work-Travel Program. However, a significant drawback for many prospective J-1 visa holders is the requirement imposed under Section 212(e) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, which mandates that certain exchange visitors return to their home countries for two years after their program concluded before they could apply for an H, L or K visa, a change of status, or permanent residency in the U.S.

This requirement applies to J-1 visa holders in one or more of the following situations:

- Government Funded Exchange Program - Participation in a program that is funded, either wholly or partially, by a U.S. government agency, the individual's home country's government, or an international organization receiving funding from these sources.
- Specialized Knowledge or Skill – Engagement in a program focused on an area of study or specialized knowledge deemed essential for the development of the individual's home country, which is listed on the Exchange Visitor "Skills List" for their nation.
- Graduate Medical Education/Training - Participation in a program to receive graduate medical education, residency, or training.

If one or more of the above situations applies, the individual will be deemed to be subject to 212(e).

The U.S. Department of State has authority to designate, through publication of public notice in the Federal Register, the Skills List, which contains a list of the countries along with the fields of specialized knowledge or skill that would subject individuals to Section 212(e). The Skills List had remained unchanged since 2009, creating a significant barrier for many foreign nationals who wished to remain in the U.S. after completing their training or educational programs.

2. The Impacts of the Recent Revisions

The removal of certain countries from the J-1 Exchange Visitor Skills List is a significant change with broad effects, opening the door for talented individuals from these countries to pursue their career goals in the U.S. without the worry of having to return home for an extended period. This change is expected to attract a more diverse group of applicants to the J-1 program. Additionally, the change applies retroactively to all J-1 visa holders since the 2009 Skills List, giving those affected by the previous requirement a chance to reassess their immigration options and consider applying for other visas or permanent residency. For many, this could mean continuing their professional growth in the U.S. without facing outdated restrictions.

However, it is important to keep in mind that this change only applied to individuals who are subject to Section 212(e) only based on the Skills List ground, and not based on one of the other three grounds listed above (government financing or graduate medical education). Therefore, some J-1 exchange visitors may still be subject to the two-year home residency requirement and it is important for individuals to carefully review their circumstances to determine if the new rule has relieved them from the applicability of Section 212(e).

3. Enhancing the Appeal of the J-1 Visa

With the foreign residence requirement as it relates to the Skills List lifted for individuals from many countries, the J-1 visa has become a more attractive option for individuals seeking to gain experience in the U.S. The ability to pursue internships, training, and educational opportunities without the concern of a mandatory return home allows J-1 visa holders to focus on their professional development and long-term career goals. This change is likely to encourage more international students and professionals to consider the U.S. as a possible destination for their educational and career pursuits.

Some examples of individuals who might be positively affected include nationals of India who completed their postdoctoral fellowships or other training in the U.S. and became subject to Section 212(e) based on the Skills List. India's removal from the 2024 Skills List would allow such individuals to pursue H-1B visa sponsorship and permanent residency in the U.S. without going home for two years or applying for a waiver. Likewise, individuals from India who completed school programs in J-1 status in a field that subjected them to the Skills List ground no longer have to comply with Section 212(e) before obtaining H, L, K visas or applying for permanent residence.

4. Navigating the Changes and Seeking Guidance

As the implications of this significant policy change unfold, it is advisable for former, current and prospective J-1 visa holders to consult with an immigration attorney to understand how the new Skills List may affect their individual situations. For some, seeking an Advisory Opinion from the State Department could provide clarity on how these changes impact their status and future plans in the United States.

In summary, the recent updates to the J-1 Exchange Visitor Skills List represent a significant shift for the program, making it more appealing and better suited to the needs of today's interconnected world. By lifting the two-year home requirement for many talented individuals, the U.S. government has not only made a substantial move to encourage international collaboration and promote cultural exchange, but it allows foreign nationals to pursue career opportunities and apply for permanent residency in the U.S. without the previous barrier of mandatory return, facilitating their professional development and integration into the American workforce.

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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FUEL-SIPPER LEXUS NX350h IS COMPACT LUXURY SUV AT ITS FINEST

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

Leave it to Lexus to shine in the compact luxury crossover segment. And that too with an h after it. It may be a hybrid but the 2025 NX350 is a fun ride to take on the road, responding with quickness in any driving situation while loaded with luxury/tech goodies and assuring safety features. The lively SUV is suitably quick, sprints from 0 to 60 in just over 7 seconds and tops at 200 mph.

A 2.5-liter 4-cylinder hybrid engine cranks out 240 horsepower @ 6000 rpm and 179 pounds-feet of torque @ 4300 rpm. The all-wheel-drive NX is coupled with two battery-powered electric motors, the second one driving the rear wheels for better traction. It is mated to an ordinary continuous variable transmission. But drivers can pick the following modes: normal, eco and sport. During slowdown and braking, the vehicle uses regenerative decelerating to apply much of the wasted energy to recharge the hybrid battery.

The long and sleek front shows off the familiar Lexus spindle grille with dark chrome trim, flanked by triple-beam LED headlights and fog lamps. The full-width tail lamp with the new LEXUS insignia is a fine touch. Step into the glowing (thanks to an array of ambient lights) and roomy cabin and quickly get cozy and comfy in the plush semi-aniline leather seats. Atop the dashboard is a huge 14-inch touch screen for the driver to control climate, audio and phone. At 27.7 cubic feet behind the second row, we could have used some more cabin room



LEXUS NX 350h (LUXURY)

Tires: P235/60HR18
Wheelbase: 105.9 inches
Length: 183.4 inches
Width: 73.3 inches
Height: 66.1 inches
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Steering: electric power
Fuel capacity: 14.5 gallons
Mileage: city 41, highway 37
Weight: 4,080 pounds
Tow capacity: 2,000 pounds
Base price: \$51,190
Price as tested: \$58,230
Web site: www.lexus.com

though the under-floor bin in the cargo area is a clever idea. Also, standard are dual auto a/c, eight-way power heated/cooled front seats and manual recline/fold 60/40 rear seat, leather-wrapped steering wheel/shifter, 10-speaker premium sound, head-up display, wireless CarPlay and Android Auto, power moon roof/liftgate and power tilt/telescopic steering column.

If in the market for a compact luxury crossover with a forceful engine, admirable gas mileage (we averaged 36 mpg in combined driving) and ample creature comforts, the NX 350h fits the bill.

TOYOTA LAND CRUISER 1958 A NOD TO ITS HERITAGE

In 1958, the very first and sole Land Cruiser was sold in the United States. At that time, SUVs were a novelty but over the years, the off-road ride with its unmistakable appearance and spirited feel has carved a niche for itself. After discontinuing in 2021, the midsize SUV is back and what a revival it is for the head-turner!

Sharing the I-FORCE MAX hybrid powertrain with the Tacoma pickup, the Land Cruiser is equipped with a 2.4-liter inline-4 cylinder turbocharged engine that cranks out 326 horsepower @ 6000 rpm and 465 pounds-feet of torque @ 1700 rpm. It is mated to a 1.87 kWh battery and 48-hp electric motor. The 8-speed auto gearbox is quiet and graceful. An independent coil spring double wishbone front and a leaf spring rear suspension grips the blows of potholes and cracked roadway effortlessly. You can count on the electric power rack-and-pinion steering for a solid and communicative feel. And 6,000-pound capacity should be plenty to tow.

Call it a square body shape (boxy is more like it) if you want but the look definitely harkens back to its heritage with retro-inspired round LEDs sandwiching the iconic TOYOTA heritage black grille with an integrated light bar. Shorter (by 1.2 inches) and narrower (4.4 inches) than its predecessor, the Land Cruiser has plenty of space for five to sit in comfort. An 8-inch infotainment screen atop the dashboard with the traditional volume button will be much appreciated by its hardcore fans. The three-spoke, manual tilt/telescoping steering column conveys a robust touch. The metal-look, especially on the 7-inch instrument panel, looks



LAND CRUISER 1958

Tires: 245/70R18
Wheelbase: 112.2 inches
Length: 193.7 inches
Height: 73.2 inches
Width: 84.2 inches
Weight: 5,038 pounds
Fuel capacity: 17.9 gallons
City: 22 mpg
Highway: 25 mpg
Base price: \$55,950
Web site: www.toyota.com

classy too. H4 and L4 dials in the center console allow the driver to switch as per different road conditions. Six-way manual front heated seats are standard along with Apple CarPlay and Android Auto. The seats may be trimmed in fabric, but they are spacious and cozy. Also included are dual auto a/c, push-button start, 60/40 rear seat, six-speaker sound system and wireless phone charger.

Cherish the squarish and rugged look of the Land Cruiser? Then you will love this 1958 edition. The midsize SUV is a throwback to the good ole days but with modern-day high-tech comforts and items, sophistication and styling. Alongside its off-road prowess, this elegant ride makes cruising the rough terrain heck of a lot of fun!

BROWARD COUNTY SCHOOLS APPROVE DIWALI HOLIDAY

By NITISH S. RELE – editor@khaasbaat.com

Come Oct. 20, 2025, Broward County schools will be closed to recognize Diwali. In a unanimous decision last month, the Broward County School Board approved the Hindu holiday for the first time. Over 35,000 students are part of the country's sixth largest school system, which already celebrates Christian and Jewish holidays, as well as the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Fitr.

"Broward County's approval of Diwali as a holiday is a testament to the power of advocacy and engagement at the local level," said Suhag Shukla, executive director and co-founder of the Hindu American Foundation. "Having our festivals recognized in this way educate others about our philosophies and practices and enable Hindu families to celebrate without the tension of their children missing important class projects or tests, so a win-win in every way."

"A huge congratulations to our community," wrote the Indian Regional & Cultural Center in an e-mail. IRCC holds the largest annual Diwali gathering in South Florida and has been working hard for Diwali to be added as a school holiday. "The news is a big step toward recognizing the amazing diversity in our community. This is more than just a holiday — it's a way to make sure our children feel our culture valued, appreciated and celebrated just like others. It also gives others the opportunity to celebrate Diwali – a festival that celebrates the light of knowledge, peace and prosperity!"

IRCC acknowledged that it has been a long tedious process and a lot of effort to get this approval. "A huge thank you to all the community leaders, parents and board members that contributed to make this possible. Cheers to progress, unity, and embracing the beauty of our diverse cultures!"



FLORIDA COMMUNITIES HONORING INDIA'S 76TH REPUBLIC DAY

Cont'd from page 1

ORLANDO: INDIAN AMERICAN BUSINESS ASSOCIATION AND CHAMBER will hold India Fair to celebrate Republic Day from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Jan. 25 at Children's Safety Village, 910 Fairvilla Road, Orlando. During the free and family-friendly event, there will be a display of culture and heritage, flag hoisting, music and dance. For information, call Yogesh at (321) 271-1217 or visit www.iabausa.com

CASSELBERRY: HINDU SOCIETY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA, 1994 Lake Drive, Casselberry, will honor India Republic Day in the community hall from noon on Jan. 26. For information, visit <https://orlandohindutemple.org/>

FORT MYERS/NAPLES

INDIA ASSOCIATION OF FORT MYERS will celebrate Republic Day on Jan. 26 at Lakes Park, Pavilion D1, 7330 Gladiolus Dr, Fort Myers. For more details, email nithya.sharma@iafortmyers.org or visit <https://www.iaftmyers.org/>

INDIA ASSOCIATION OF NAPLES will hold Republic Day picnic from 2 to 5 p.m. Jan. 12 at Vineyards Park (Pavilion #1), 6231 Arbor Blvd., W., Naples. At the free event, IAN will provide coffee, tea, water and chips. Various activities are planned. For information, email [naplesindia@gmail.com](mailto:neplesindia@gmail.com)

JACKSONVILLE

INDIAN CULTURAL SOCIETY OF JACKSONVILLE will celebrate India Day from 4 to 7 p.m. Jan. 26. Venue to be announced. Children can showcase a kit, dance or group song. For information, email jaxics@gmail.com

Event Chair: Mrs. Sujatha Neelam
Event Co-Chair: Mrs. Gayathri Ramaka

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Proudly Celebrates India 76th Republic Day

09:00 AM to 6:00 PM Jan 26, 2025, ICC Hall, @5511 Lynn Rd, Tampa

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|--|---|--|---|--|--|---|---|--|---|--|--|---|---|---|
| <p>Executive Committee:</p> <p>President: Gayathri Ramaka</p> <p>President Elect: Abhay Vaswani</p> <p>Exec. Vice President: Sunitha Saravanan</p> <p>Secretary: Dr. Anu Kotha</p> <p>Jt. Secretary: Manasa Raghavendra</p> <p>Treasurer: Dipanwita Basu</p> <p>Vice Presidents: Ramesh Pusala Himatil Parekh Govind Gouda Vidya Takkalaki</p> <p>Members at Large: Uma Setty Manish Patel Sunitha Flowerhill Himanshu Behera Keval Brahmhatt Bhavik Modi</p> | <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;"> Youth Art and Essay Contest 09:00 AM to 11:00 AM Dr. Anu Kotha Abhay Vaswani fia_tpa_youth_Contest@googlegroups.com </td> <td style="text-align: center;"> Duets of FIA Preliminary: Jan 11th 2025 Jigisha Desai Ramnarayanan Mani fia_tpa_VoiceOfFIA@googlegroups.com </td> <td style="text-align: center;"> Cooking Competition 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM Sunitha Saravanan FIA_TPA_Cooking@googlegroups.com </td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;"> Patriotic Dress Competition 11:00 AM - Noon Uma Setty FIA_TPA_FancyDress@googlegroups.com </td> <td style="text-align: center;"> Flag Hoisting 1:30 PM Chenda Melam, Parade Flag Hoisting </td> <td style="text-align: center;"> Cultural Programs 2:30 PM - 06:00 PM Vidya Takkalaki FIA_TPA_Cultural@googlegroups.com </td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;"> Spirit of Freedom Blood Drive Jan 26th 03:00 PM to 06:00 PM at ICC Hall Ramesh Pusala FIA_TPA_Wellness@googlegroups.com </td> <td style="text-align: center;"> 5K Walk & Run Jan 19th 9 AM 2025 Raju Ramaka FIA_TPA_Sports@googlegroups.com </td> <td style="text-align: center;"> Chess Refer contest flier for more info. Sampath Narayanan Ajit Mujumdar FIA_TPA_Sports@googlegroups.com </td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;"> Rangoli Competition 11:00 AM - 12 PM Manasa Raghavendra FIA_TPA_Rangoli@googlegroups.com </td> <td style="text-align: center;"> Exhibits by Member Organizations Gayathri Ramaka Jigisha Desai FIA_TPA_member@googlegroups.com </td> <td style="text-align: center;"> Vendor Booth/Digital Ad Jigisha Desai Jay Chandran FIA_TPA_member@googlegroups.com </td> </tr> </table> | Youth Art and Essay Contest 09:00 AM to 11:00 AM Dr. Anu Kotha Abhay Vaswani fia_tpa_youth_Contest@googlegroups.com | Duets of FIA Preliminary: Jan 11th 2025 Jigisha Desai Ramnarayanan Mani fia_tpa_VoiceOfFIA@googlegroups.com | Cooking Competition 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM Sunitha Saravanan FIA_TPA_Cooking@googlegroups.com | Patriotic Dress Competition 11:00 AM - Noon Uma Setty FIA_TPA_FancyDress@googlegroups.com | Flag Hoisting 1:30 PM Chenda Melam, Parade Flag Hoisting | Cultural Programs 2:30 PM - 06:00 PM Vidya Takkalaki FIA_TPA_Cultural@googlegroups.com | Spirit of Freedom Blood Drive Jan 26th 03:00 PM to 06:00 PM at ICC Hall Ramesh Pusala FIA_TPA_Wellness@googlegroups.com | 5K Walk & Run Jan 19th 9 AM 2025 Raju Ramaka FIA_TPA_Sports@googlegroups.com | Chess Refer contest flier for more info. Sampath Narayanan Ajit Mujumdar FIA_TPA_Sports@googlegroups.com | Rangoli Competition 11:00 AM - 12 PM Manasa Raghavendra FIA_TPA_Rangoli@googlegroups.com | Exhibits by Member Organizations Gayathri Ramaka Jigisha Desai FIA_TPA_member@googlegroups.com | Vendor Booth/Digital Ad Jigisha Desai Jay Chandran FIA_TPA_member@googlegroups.com | <p>Trustee Board Directors:</p> <p>Chairman: Dr. Kotha Sekharam</p> <p>Secretary: Ravi Naryanan</p> <p>Board Members: Chandrakant Patel Dr. Shyam Mohapatra Dr. Kaushal Chari Satish Sharma</p> <p>Advisory Board: Dr. Krishan K Batra</p> <p>Youth Committee Jyoshni Ram Smita Prabhu Krisha Chandran Sanjay Srinivasan Siddharth Muthukumar Ananya Srinivasan Pranav Ananth Deepika Padmanaban Divit Kalmady Dishanth Holla Arin Basu</p> |
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FLORIDA CELEBRATES LOHRI/PONGAL/MAKAR SANKRANT!

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JAN. 11: UTTARAYAN; organized by Gujarati Samaj of Tampa Bay; Jennings Middle School, 9325 Governors Run Drive, Seffner; 11 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.; lunch provided; Indian kite and thread available for purchase; free for GSTB members, \$30 non-members; for information, call GSTB President Bhavik Modi at (813) 557-4555.

JAN. 12-14: LOHRI/MAKAR SANKRANT; Sanatan Mandir, 311 E. Palm Ave., Tampa; 6 p.m.; for information, call (813) 221-4482 or visit www.sanatanmandirtampa.org

JAN. 19: LOHRI; organized by **PUNJABI VIRSA TAMPA;** \$50 adult, \$25 for kids ages 6 and 13, free for kids 5 years and under; India Cultural Center, 5511 Lynn Road, Tampa; for information call Binder at (813) 956-2411.

ORLANDO/GROVELAND/CASSELBERRY

JAN. 13-14: LOHRI BONFIRE at 7 p.m. on Jan. 13; next day, Makar Sankranti; Hindu Society of Central Florida, 1994 Lake Drive, Casselberry; 7 p.m.; for information, call (407) 699-5277 or visit www.orlandohindutemple.org

JAN. 12: UTTARAYAN; organized by **GUJARATI SOCIETY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA;** Pine Lake Retreat, 21725 County Road 33, Groveland; 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.; children's activities/playground; food available; free for members, \$25 non-members; for information, call (407) 600-0971.



JACKSONVILLE

JAN. 12: UTTARAYAN PICNIC; planned by **GUJARATI SAMAJ OF NORTH EAST FLORIDA;** 10 a.m.; Jacksonville Equestrian Center, 13611 Normandy Blvd., Jacksonville; \$10 per person; RSVP required; kites/thread and food will be available for purchase; for information, call (224) 622-0655 or visit www.gsnef.org/events.aspx to buy tickets.

SOUTH FLORIDA (POMPANO BEACH, MIAMI, DAVIE)

MIAMI – JAN. 11: UTTARAYAN; organized by **INDIAN CULTURAL CLUB OF SOUTH FLORIDA;** Ron Ehmann Park, 10995 S.W. 97th Ave., Miami; 1 to 4:30 p.m.; free; kites/kids for sale, for information, RSVP to info@iccosf.org or visit www.iccosf.org

DAVIE – JAN. 18: THAI PONGAL; organized by **ILANKA THAMIL MANRAM OF SOUTH FLORIDA;** Family Farms, 14950 SW 14th St., Davie; 10:30 a.m. breakfast, followed by program of banana leaf meal, farm animals for kids, Pongal games, tractor ride,

Kumi dance; for information, visit <https://thamilmanram.com>

POMPANO BEACH – JAN. 25: LOHRI MELA; organized by **PUNJABI ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH FLORIDA;** Sample-McDougald House, 450 N.E. 10th St., Pompano Beach; 5 to 10 p.m.; \$5 tickets online, \$8 at gate; for information, call (954) 649-2938.

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A TRIBUTE TO THE USTAD OF ALL USTADS, ZAKIR HUSSAIN!

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

"As I speak to you, my tabla is literally three feet away from me. Since I was 3 days old, I have heard only the tabla tone and sound. I will play it till it has to leave me or I decide to leave and go to the next world." So spoke the late Zakir Hussain in 2016 in one of a few interviews to Khaas Baat. The tabla maestro, also a composer, percussionist, music producer and film actor, died Dec. 15 in San Francisco.

At the ripe age of just 12, the son of the legendary Ustad Allarakha would accompany Indian classical musicians and dancers to concerts and by 18, he would go on international tours. The world music movement has been orphaned with his demise, leaving behind such wonderful collaborations as Shakti, Remember Shakti, Masters of Percussion, Planet Drum and Global Drum Project with Mickey Hart, Tabla Beat Science, Sangam with Charles Lloyd and Eric Harland, CrossCurrents with Dave Holland and Chris Potter, in trio with Béla Fleck and Edgar Meyer, and, most recently, with Herbie Hancock. A recipient of Padma Shri, Padma Vibhushan, Padma Bhushan, Ustadji has four Grammys to his credit.

And when we had asked his advice to youngsters learning tabla, Ustadji had told us, "Don't get awed by the information that this is such an old tradition. Just



PHOTO CREDIT: Susana Millman

approach it as a drum and try to enjoy it and be friends with it and maybe then it will reveal itself to you. As a child, I used to bang on the drum and in doing so, myself and the tabla bonded! It's the best possible toy any child could have."

Shankh Lahiri, director and founder of Shruti Foundation, Shruti School of Music and Wahh World Fusion Band said on behalf of the entire artist and musician community from Tampa Bay, "We are paying our deepest Shradhanjali to our legend, Ustad Zakir Hussain Sahab. His contribution to music, especially Indian and world music, will remain forever. His sudden departure at the age of 73 left us with a big emptiness inside our hearts, but his joyful music and his creative genius inspire us constantly. His driving force toward being a student of life and openness brings new ideas unparalleled to our music world. Thank you, maestro Ustad Zakir Hussain, for all your contributions to our lives."

We are sure Zakir Hussain is regaling the audiences in the next world with his magical fingers doing the talking. So long, Ustadji, and we can only express our humble gratitude for the memories that you left us to cherish forever.





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FOUR ADMISSIONS TIPS (PLUS ONE) FOR 11TH GRADERS AND THEIR PARENTS

By ROBERT A.G. LEVINE



It's getting closer, that stress-ridden time when 12th graders apply to colleges. In a few months, that may include your family. If so, you are wondering: Am I doing enough? Am I missing something?

Let's focus on the four things – plus one – that juniors and their parents need to know for successful admissions efforts.

First: Get good grades! You undoubtedly know to get good grades, but perhaps you don't realize how significant this year's marks will be. When you apply to college, your application will likely be submitted before any grade

12 scores are available. So, do well in your last high school year, but do not overstress. Make sure to balance your school work with your admissions effort.

For now, if you are struggling in any class ... pay attention and do something about it! Ask your teacher for help; look at your syllabus to understand where you are in the context of the entire course; take advantage of the many, many instructional videos that are available online; and ask your parents to hire a tutor. Do not let anything get in the way of your success.

Second: Be involved in school and beyond! Especially for our top colleges, a student's current involvement in extracurricular activities foreshadows their potential involvement at the university level. Be involved in your school and be involved beyond your school. Think geographically, even internationally. But, please, please, please avoid chasing the "checklist" of summer programs, passion projects, internships, research, and charitable efforts. That doesn't work. If the checklists worked, then everybody with a complete checklist who applied to a top school would be admitted. That ... does ... not ... happen.

The rule is "you be you" – that way, they can find you – but if there are exceptions to a rule, then for extracurriculars, the exceptions are (1) have leadership titles (the applications have a field to insert them); (2) show them your community service (everyone has to do service, so don't be the kid who seems to hate other

people because service is not listed on their application); and (3) be physically active (because those who are physically active during college give three times more money in alumni donations).

Third: Get your best test score! Choose either the SAT or ACT (not both) and prepare as well as you can before the test. For most people, we recommend SAT but look at the formats and decide which you prefer. Do not rely upon a practice test score. It is not a good indicator of future performance. Focus on formats. Once you have chosen a test, take it as many times as necessary (three is usually the limit in terms of your performance), then decide if you should or should not submit your test scores. For some schools, you will do better by submitting your scores, but for others, you may wish to rely on your grades alone. However, you cannot make those decisions without having scores, so give it your best shot instead of whining "I'm not a good test taker." Finally, pick test dates that work with your schedule(s) and start preparing two to three months in advance. FYI: for SAT, we typically recommend the test administrations given in March, August and October (the other test dates are in the midst of busy school seasons).

Fourth: Talk with your teacher! Our top universities request and require recommendation letters from teachers. The best letters come from people who know you well, regardless of their position or stature. In other words, it's the letter – not the author – that impresses. The better they know you, the better your teachers can help you. Chat with them about why they chose their subjects; how your future matches with what they teach; or simply ask for advice.

And as an extra bonus ...

Fifth: Communicate with your counselor! In January or February of grade 11, your college counselor will start getting to know you, usually through a meeting. Counselors have the ability – and responsibility – to help students achieve their top schools. The better they know you, the more they can help you. But it's more than that: when you appreciate their efforts, they will naturally appreciate you too and thus help you a bit more than those students who do not appreciate them. By informing your counselor of your plans and efforts (and asking for their advice) as much as possible, help them to help you!

Let's do this!

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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Sponsors: TAF, Tampa Tamil Assoc., HESS, GroundSarma Health, Esthetic Design District, Jaya Moonfais, MATA, TGF, and HTF.

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Date & Time: Jan 19, 2025 @ 9:00 AM

Register Online: <https://tinyurl.com/FIA-NATS-5K>

Registration Fee:
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\$35: 1-Jan thru 18-Jan
\$40: Race Day

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Contact:
Race Director:
Raju Ramake (813) 500-8732

FIA:
Jay Chandran (813) 992-2014
Gayathri Ramake (813) 368-3178
Abhay Vaswani (727) 871-0878

NATS:
Bhanu Dhulipalla (813) 342-4925
Sreenivasa Atchi (813) 451-4190
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ASTROLOGY 2025 – A YEAR OF TRANSFORMATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES/ JANUARY FORECAST

By PANKAJ KOHLI



The year 2025 marks an important period in astrology, with significant planetary shifts influencing zodiac signs. Major transits include Saturn, Jupiter, Rahu and Ketu changing their signs, creating opportunities and challenges. Personalized insights, based on individual birth charts, will offer deeper clarity on how to navigate and maximize this transformative year.

2025: Planetary Transits Overview

- March 29, 2025: Saturn transits from Aquarius to Pisces. Spiritual Evolution: Saturn's stay in Pisces fosters holistic spiritual practices and a bend towards a simpler lifestyle.
- 1. May 14: Jupiter moves from Taurus to Gemini blessing Libra, Sagittarius and Aquarius.
- 2. May 18: Rahu shifts to Aquarius, and Ketu moves to Leo bringing mixed changes to multiple signs.
- 3. July 13-Nov. 28: Saturn begins its retrograde motion in July and returns to direct motion in November urging individuals to channel their efforts responsibly.

ARIES / Mesha (Fire sign, ruling planet is Mars) -

(March 21-April 20) Mars Sign – Stars covered Ashwini, Bharani, Kritika (1st Part) The planetary position highlights career achievements, financial stability, family harmony and public recognition. Saturn, the lord of your 10th and 11th houses, moves into your 12th house on March 29, 2025, marking the onset of a new phase. This placement influences second, sixth and ninth houses, bringing long-term travel opportunities or temporary settlement in foreign lands for some. Health concerns may surface for some. This period could yield financial gains for some too. However, during July to November, some may see increased expenses, so financial planning is essential. Saturn begins its retrograde motion in July and returns to direct motion in November urging individuals to channel their efforts responsibly and adhere to moral paths during this time. Failure to comply may result in Saturn imposing karmic lessons. This transit is a significant time to realign with Saturn's teachings of understanding one's boundaries and hard work. This is a watchful time due to Saturn's retrograde phase; it may escalate health and financial challenges. Post-retrograde, many may find relief.

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) For Taurus natives, Saturn governs your ninth and 10th houses and will transit into your 11th house, a highly favorable position. Improved relationships with seniors and fruitful collaborations may be expected. This transit supports resolving long-standing issues and achieving success in multiple areas. Planetary placement emphasizes partnerships, bringing harmony or challenges based on mutual understanding. The Sun's transit into Capricorn boosts travel, higher studies and spiritual growth. Saturn in Aquarius requires a disciplined approach to your career, while Jupiter in Taurus ensures personal growth and confidence. Rahu's influence encourages introspection, while Ketu may bring health challenges requiring attention. The Moon's transition through Rohini Nakshatra emphasizes emotional grounding and creativity. While the period from July to November can cause mild flutters however, the overall transit is auspicious for career growth and financial stability. Long journeys to enhance professional growth can be seen for some.

GEMINI / Mithuna (Air sign, ruling planet is Mercury) - (May 22-June 21) Mercury Sign - Stars covered Mrigashira (last 2 parts), Ardra & Punarvasu (3 parts) Mercury, Gemini's lord, strengthens communication within partnerships, both personal and professional. The Sun's movement into Capricorn may bring transformation and introspection. Saturn in Aquarius supports long-term academic and spiritual pursuits. Jupiter in Taurus enhances opportunities for overseas ventures, energizes social connections and introspection regarding creativity in life. The Moon's Nakshatra journey through Ardra highlights an emotionally charged period for self-expression and adaptability. Saturn, ruling your eighth and ninth houses, enters the 10th house, offering opportunities for professional success. Despite increased workloads, hard work may yield fruitful results. Saturn's aspects could bring fluctuations in family life and require vigilance regarding elder family members' health, especially between July-November. Stable financial growth and career advancements are likely if one remains diligent. This period also favors

adhering to rules in professional matters.

CANCER / Karaka (Watery sign, ruling planet is Moon) - (June 22-July 22)

Moon Sign – Stars covered Punarvasu (4th part), Pushya, Aslesha The Moon, Cancer's ruler, shifts through various Nakshatras, affecting all areas of life dynamically. January's full moon in Cancer can bring emotional clarity concerning personal goals. The Sun's transition sheds light on partnerships and collaboration. Saturn's placement in Aquarius pushes transformation through shared resources and spiritual growth. Jupiter's transit gets gains through social circles, increases ambition and career aspirations and professional networks. Moon's transition through Pushya Nakshatras fosters nurturing energy for resourceful purposes. Saturn's transit eases past challenges. Business travel may yield favorable outcomes, and your marital bond will strengthen through mutual understanding. Saturn's influence promises unexpected financial gains and resolution of pending dues. However, health concerns may arise between July-November. Post-retrograde, a positive shift in income and winning over adversity seems likely.

LEO / Simha (Fire sign, ruling planet is Sun) - (July 23-Aug. 22) Sun Sign –

Stars covered Magha, Purva Phalguni, and Uttara Phalguni (1st part) The Sun, Leo's ruler, transits Capricorn focusing on health and resolving conflicts. This is a period for disciplined efforts in one's daily routine. Saturn in Aquarius demands accountability in relationships, emphasizing commitment and patience. Jupiter's position in Taurus supports career growth and recognition energizes spiritual pursuits, foreign travel and thorough introspection. The Moon's transit through Nakshatras like Magha encourages leadership and creative self-expression during the month. Saturn's transition may create a challenging period for some. Health concerns, including chronic issues, could arise, so proactive care is essential. This phase is favorable for repaying debts and resolving legal matters. Saturn's aspect on your tenth, second, and fifth houses might bring professional ups and downs. Remain patient and diligent to overcome challenges. From July to November, heightened caution is necessary, but conditions might improve later, bringing career stability and success.

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) Mercury ruling Virgo brings focus on home and emotional well-being. The Sun's transit into Capricorn encourages creative endeavors and strengthens relationships with children. Saturn's placement in Aquarius requires attention to health and discipline in work routines. Jupiter's transit supports higher education, and travel may also bring transformative experiences. As the Moon transitions through Virgo Nakshatras such as Hasta, it encourages practicality and meticulous attention to detail. Saturn transits into your seventh house in March, influencing long-term partnerships and potentially paving way for fruitful partnerships. Saturn's impact on the ninth, first, and fourth houses may lead to some long-term travel plans, which could bring mental peace despite depleting energy levels. From July to November, family discord and fluctuations in marital relationships may arise, requiring patience and tact. This period supports long-term investments and international ventures, ensuring professional success if handled with care.

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) Venus, Libra lords transition enhances focus on wealth and family values. The Sun's placement in Capricorn emphasizes domestic stability and emotional grounding. Saturn's position in Aquarius encourages disciplined creativity and responsibility toward children. Jupiter's influence on Taurus brings opportunities for transformation and shared financial growth. However, some unpredictability in relationships can be seen by some. The Moon's transition through Swati brings a balance of independence and harmony in relationships. With Saturn entering the sixth house in March, this transit promises triumph over adversaries and professional growth. Efforts at work can be rewarded, and competitive challenges will be overcome. However, avoid laziness to prevent health issues, particularly during Saturn's retrograde phase from July to November. Saturn's influence on your eighth, 12th and third houses support resolving disputes and health improvements. This is a promising time for students preparing for exams, as diligence may yield success.

SCORPIO / Vruschika (Water sign, ruling planet is Mars) - (Oct. 24-Nov. 22) Mars

Sign – Stars covered Vishakha (4th part), Anuradha, Jyestha Mars, the lord of Scorpio, enhances focus on finances and family matters. The Sun's movement into Capricorn strengthens communication and courage. Saturn's position in Aquarius

demands focus on emotional stability and home life. Jupiter's position in Taurus brings harmony and growth in partnerships, overcoming obstacles and enhances spiritual pursuits. The Moon's transit through Anuradha Nakshatra emphasizes deep emotional connections. Saturn's transit into your fifth house strengthens romantic relationships and enhances emotional bonds. Some may work toward permanent alliance or solidify a committed partnership. This stage may support financial gains and career growth. However, avoid major job changes between July and November, as this could result in setbacks. After this phase, stability and success may follow. Investing or exploring new business strategies might bring profits.

SAGITTARIUS / Dhanush (Fire sign, ruling planet is Jupiter) - (Nov. 23-Dec. 21) Jupiter Sign – Stars covered Moola, Purva Shada, Uttara Shada (first part) Jupiter, Sagittarius's lord, in Taurus supports health improvement and overcoming challenges. The Sun's transit in Capricorn emphasizes financial planning and success. Saturn in Aquarius enhances discipline in communication and learning, stimulates creativity and encouraging detachment from superficial social connections. The Moon's transit through Mula deepens spiritual exploration. Saturn's shift into your fourth house may bring mixed signals. This transit could distance one from their family due to work-related relocations, creating temporary disharmony. Special care for mother's health may be required. Legal matters may well conclude in your favor, and disciplined efforts will yield success. Between July and November, be vigilant about chest infections and parents' well-being, especially mother. Conditions may improve post-retrograde, allowing progress in both personal and professional life.

CAPRICORN / Makara (Earthen sign, ruling planet is Saturn) - (Dec. 22-Jan. 20) Saturn Sign – Stars covered Uttara Shada (last 3 parts) Shrivana, Dhanistha (first 2 parts) Saturn, Capricorn's ruler, continues its transit in Aquarius, emphasizing disciplined financial planning. The Sun's presence in Capricorn strengthens self-expression and personal power. Jupiter in Taurus encourages creativity and academic growth. However, there may be changes in domestic life, and an introspection and working toward achieving professional goals. The Moon's transit through Shrivana Nakshatra supports practical achievements. With Saturn moving into your third house, a testing period comes to an end, bringing a phase of positive change. Expect short trips, potential foreign travel, and an increased interest in spirituality. Relationships with siblings may deepen, though their health may need some attention. Saturn's influence on your fifth, ninth, and 12th houses supports educational growth, career stability and financial gains. Be cautious about digestive health between July and November. Hard work done during this time may lead to rewarding outcomes later.

AQUARIUS / Kumbha (Air sign, ruling planet is Saturn) – (Jan. 21-Feb. 19) Saturn Sign - Stars covered: Dhanistha (last 2 parts) Satabhisha, Purva Bhadra Pada (1st 3 parts) Saturn, the lord of Aquarius, in Aquarius strengthens self-discipline and personal growth. The Sun's movement into Capricorn emphasizes introspection and spiritual pursuits. Jupiter in Taurus fosters domestic harmony and enhances communication with deepening spiritual understanding. The Moon's transit through Satabhisha encourages analytical thinking and self-care. As Saturn moves into your second house, it puts special emphasis on financial planning and wealth accumulation. This transit also brings success for those employed abroad or in international business. Family relationships may face fluctuations, and it is essential to maintain harmony. Saturn's aspect on your fourth, eighth and 12th houses could yield property-related gains. From July to November, expect challenges in saving money and family discord, but persistent efforts will help one achieve financial stability.

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 Jupiter, Pisces's ruler, in Taurus enhances learning and communication. The Sun's transit in Capricorn highlights gains through social circles. Saturn in Aquarius supports meditation and solitude, reshapes financial priorities and fosters



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transformative growth. The Moon's transit through Revati enhances compassion and adaptability. Saturn's transit into your sign brings significant changes, as it governs 11th and 12th houses. This phase may impact one positively, fostering improved relations with siblings and new business opportunities. Long-term professional planning may also be advantageous. From July to November, marital relationships could require extra time to become smooth and happy. During this stretch, mental stress might also increase. Post-retrograde, stability may return, supporting professional growth and financial success.

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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TAX PLANNING

UNLOCKING TAX SAVINGS: THE BENEFITS OF A COST SEGREGATION STUDY

By TEJAL DHRUVE



A cost segregation study allows a business property owner to accelerate depreciation deductions. That, in turn, enables the owner to reduce current taxable income and increase cash flow.

A cost segregation study combines accounting and engineering techniques to identify building costs that are properly allocable to tangible personal property rather than real property. It then allows the personal property to be reclassified for tax purposes and deducted over a much shorter depreciation period. This strategy has been consistently upheld in the courts.

Fundamentals of Depreciation

Business buildings generally have a 39-year depreciation period. Typically, companies depreciate a building's structural components (such as walls, windows, HVAC systems, plumbing and wiring) along with the building. Personal property (such as equipment, machinery, furniture and fixtures) is eligible for accelerated depreciation, usually over five or seven years. Often, businesses allocate all, or most, of their buildings' acquisition or construction costs to real property, overlooking opportunities to allocate costs to shorter-lived personal property or land improvements. Items that appear to be "part of a building" may, in fact, be personal property. Examples include removable wall and floor coverings, removable partitions, awnings, canopies, window treatments and signs.

Shine a Light on Outdoor Savings

Rules for outdoor lighting, parking lots, landscaping and fencing are tricky but can still lead to current tax deductions in certain situations. These expenditures are generally treated as capital improvements, subject to the 15-year depreciation rule. For instance, if you replace your business lighting to upgrade it or provide greater security at night, it qualifies as a deductible capital improvement. Similarly, landscaping projects designed to boost your curb appeal or provide environmental benefits are considered capital improvements. On the other hand, routine maintenance (such as the costs of mowing and watering the lawn surrounding your business building) typically fall into the category of deductible business expenses, just like minor repairs.

Worth Checking Out

Although the relative costs and benefits of a cost segregation study will depend on your particular facts and circumstances, it can be a valuable investment.

And, under the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017, the potential benefits of a cost segregation study may be even greater than they were years ago because of enhancements to certain depreciation-related tax breaks.

Contact the office for further details.

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Under the Cover



By Nitish Rele

"A Disappearance in Fiji" by Nilima Rao; 288 pages; \$25.95 (published by Soho Crime; www.sohocrime.com)

"From 1879 to 1916, over 60,000 Indians went to Fiji as indentured servants, or grimityas. About half of them cashed in their return trip to India, leaving about 30,000 to start a new life in Fiji," the author reveals. Nilima Rao's great-grandparents were among those 30,000. And that served as an inspiration for the Fijian Indian Australian author to describe the struggles of enslaved life in 1914 Fiji in this engrossing book, which is intertwined with an intriguing mystery tale. After an oversight handling a case in Hong Kong, 25-year-old Indian police Sergeant Akal Singh is

transferred to thankless cases in Fiji. Secluded and grouchy with a bitter taste in his mouth, he trudges through his work, dreaming of returning to Hong Kong or native India. But after an indentured Indian woman, Kunti, goes missing from a sugarcane plantation, Singh sees an opportunity to set things right. There are several hurdles in his way, such as intimidating white plantation owners, anxious Indian indentured servants and the native Fijians. But the sergeant along with the assistance of Fijian corporal Taviti and Dr. Holmes cracks the case despite facing racism as well as his own prejudices and notions of identity. In the author's note, Rao acknowledges borrowing the name Kunti from the story of a real woman "who was sent to an isolated place to work as punishment. While she was there, the plantation overseer came, restrained her, and made 'improper suggestions toward her.'" After Kunti escaped and threw herself into the river, she was rescued, and her story made headlines in Indian newspapers putting the spotlight on the degradation of Indian women on colonial plantations. Our hats off to Rao for a delightful debut novel with absorbing characters while tackling colonial racism and the imposed caste system. It is no surprise that the second in the Sergeant Akal Singh series "A Shipwreck in Fiji" will be released later this year.



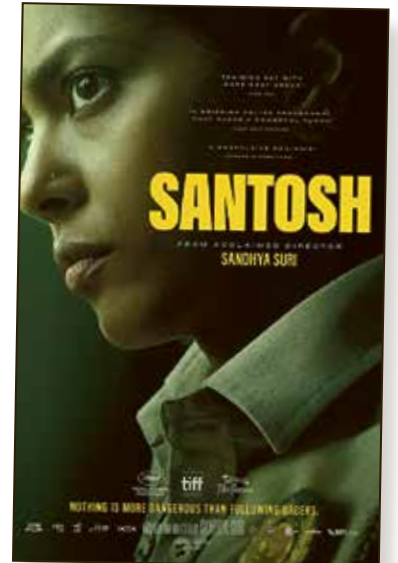
'SANTOSH' PICKED FOR OSCAR SHORTLIST

Sandhya Suri's award-winning new thriller "Santosh" has been shortlisted for Best International Feature Film of the year by the Academy Awards. It is one of only 15 films selected for the Oscar shortlist in this category out of 85 total films submitted by countries all around the world.

The crime thriller starring Shahana Goswami and Sunita Rajwar boasts a perfect 100 percent critics score on Rotten Tomatoes.

Ripped from her life of domesticity, Santosh, a young widow now desperate to support herself, accepts an opportunity to inherit her husband's job as a police officer in the rural badlands of India. Quickly taken under the wing of Sharma, a charismatic and commanding older female inspector, Santosh begins an investigation into a low-caste girl's brutal murder that plunges her into a gritty world of crime and corruption, forcing her to confront not only the brokenness of the system around her, but her own place within it.

The 97th Oscars will be held on March 2, 2025.





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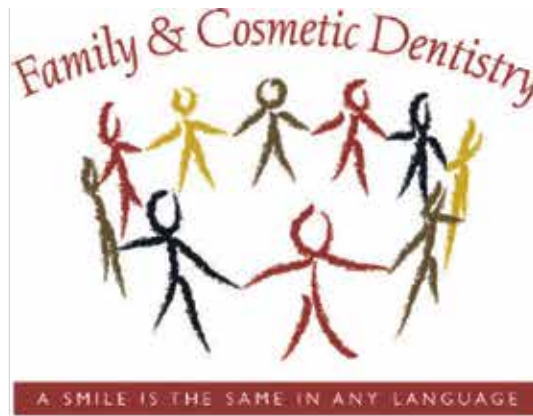


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