

KHAASBAAT

A PUBLICATION FOR INDIAN AMERICANS IN FLORIDA

MARCH 2026

WWW.KHAASBAAT.COM

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HAPPY HOLI

FESTIVAL OF COLORS



Here are some of the communities celebrating the festival of colors in Florida:

TAMPA BAY AREA

MARCH 22: organized by **Gujarati Samaj of Tampa Bay**; Rang Barse; 11 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.; Morris Bridge Farm, 3745 Morris Bridge Road, Zephyrhills; free for GSTB members, \$30 for non-members; for information, call Sandip Patel at (865) 771-9190.

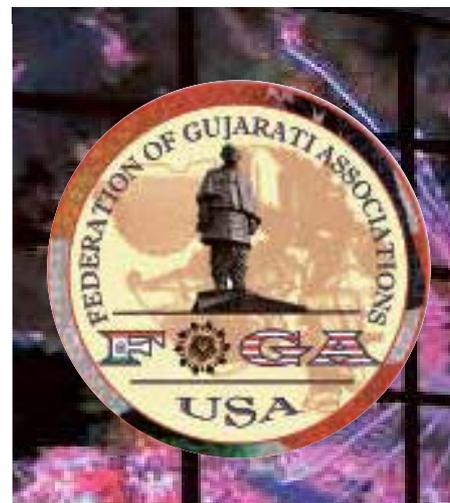
ORLANDO/CASSELBERRY

MARCH 2: **Hindu Society of Central Florida**, 1994 Lake Drive, Casselberry; 6:30 p.m. pooja with Holika Dahan at 7 p.m.; for information, call (407) 699-5277 or visit www.orlandohindutemple.org

SOUTH FLORIDA

MARCH 8: **Holi picnic; organized by Indian Regional and Cultural Center (IRCC)**; Miramar Regional Park, 16801 Miramar Parkway; 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.; for details, call Durgesh Thaker at (954) 543-1539 or visit www.irccflorida.org to purchase tickets.

For more communities celebrating the festival of colors in Florida see page 10



ORLANDO TO HOST

UNITED GUJARATI CONVENTION

MAY 22-25

See page 10

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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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E V E N T S

EVENTS

TAMPA/ST. PETERSBURG/PLANT CITY

MARCH 4: 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 Jitubhai Vora at (941) 962-9774.

MARCH 5-7: SPIFFS INTERNATIONAL

FOLK FAIR; presented by Saint Petersburg International Folk Fair Society (SPIFFS) and Volunteers of Indian Culture, Art and Science Society (VICAS); England Brothers Park, 5010 81st Ave. N., Pinellas Park; 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.; music, dance, crafts, and cuisine from various cultures, including VICAS; for information, visit <https://www.spiffs.org/>

MARCH 10: 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.

MARCH 14: "MRS. MARA ONLINE CHHE"; Gujarati comedy play presented by Record A Hit Entertainment; enacted by actress Rashami Desai; Chamberlain High School, 9401 N. Blvd., Tampa; 6:30 p.m.; \$30, \$40, \$60; call Bhavik Modi at (813) 557-4555.

MARCH 18: 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.

LAKELAND/BARTOW

MARCH 8: PICNIC; organized by Bhartiya Samaj of Central Florida; 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Mary Holland Park, 2015 Shumate Drive, Bartow; for information, visit <https://www.bscfl.com>

SIGNIFICANT DATES

MARCH 3: HOLI

MARCH 19: GUDI PADWA/UGADI/CHETI CHAND (HINDU NEW YEAR BEGINNING)

MARCH 21: RAMADAN ENDS (EID MUBARAK)

MARCH 26: RAM NAVAMI

MARCH 31: MAHAVIR JAYANTI

MARCH 21: CHAITAR MAS GARBA; organized by Bhartiya Samaj of Central Florida; Bartow Civic Center, 2250 S, Floral Ave.; for time and other information, visit <https://www.bscfl.com>

BRADENTON/SARASOTA

MARCH 13-15: "NAGA-MANDALA" (PLAY WITH A COBRA); theater production by playwright Girish Karnad; Sailor Circus Arena, The Circus Arts Observatory, 2075 Bahia Vista St., Sarasota; for timings and tickets, visit www.circusarts.org

ORLANDO

MARCH 29: 4TH ANNUAL PICKLEBALL TOURNAMENT; organized by Indian American Business Association & Chamber; USTA National Campus (Lake Nona), 10000 USTA Blvd., Orlando; 8 a.m. to 2 p.m.; \$80 doubles; for information, call (201) 303-4050 or www.IABAUSA.com/pickleball26

MAY 22-25: UNITED GUJARATI CONVENTION 2026; organized by Federation of Gujarati Associations of USA (FOGAUSA) and local Florida Gujarati societies; for more information and to register, www.FOGAUSA.org

GAINESVILLE/ALACHUA

MARCH 7: INDIA FEST (TRADITIONS OF INDIA); presented by India Cultural & Education Center; Legacy Park Multipurpose Center, 15400 Peggy Road, Alachua; 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Indian food, music/dance, fashion, jewelry; for information, email indiafest@icec-florida.org or visit www.icec-florida.org

Cont'd on page 4



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March 2026 Events

Monday, March 2 (5:30-7:30 PM)
Holika Dahan Puja - 7:30 PM
(Kinechi Prasad will be served after)
Partial Lunar Eclipse Observed in Tampa (Midnight)
(Call Temple Priests for Details)

Friday, March 6 (6:30-8:00 PM)
Sankashthi Chaturthi
Group Ganesh Havan

Saturday, March 7 (5:30-8:00 PM)
Shree Jagannath Bhajan
(Prasad served after Aarti)
Sponsor: Mita Mishra & Family

Sunday, March 8 (4:00-7:00 PM)
Maha Holi Mela & Dhuleti (Bangwali) Celebrations
With Lord Bal Krishna

Saturday, March 14 (8:00 PM)
Pag Mochini Ekadashi
Pooja & Aarti

Monday, March 16 (6:00-8:00 PM)
Pradosh Pooja
Group Shiv Pooja

Thursday, March 19 (11:00 AM-12:00 PM)
Sanatan Hindu New Year (Vikram Samvat 2083)
Gudi Padvo
Jhulelal Jayanti (Cheti Chand)
Start of 9-Day Chaitri Navaratri Anushthan
Kalash (Ghat) & Jawar Pooja for Akhand Jyoti Sthapna
(For details call Temple Manager: 813-221-4482)

Saturday, March 21 (5:30-8:00 PM)
Group Mata Ki Chowki
(Information: 813-221-4482)

Sunday, March 22 (11:30 AM-1:00 PM)
Cheti Chand Celebrations
Shree Jhulelal Ji Bhajan (Prasad served after Aarti)

Sunday, March 22 (4:00-6:00 PM)
Gujarati Bhajan
(Prasad served after Aarti)
Sponsor: Jigarbhai Patel
(Son of Late Shri Kiranbhai Becharbhai Patel & Family, Gaam Ajargura)

Wednesday, March 25 (5:30-8:00 PM)
Durga Ashtami
Group Durga Havan
(Prasad served after Aarti) (Details: 813-221-4482)

Thursday, March 26 (12:00 PM)
7th Temple Anniversary
Shree Ram Navami Janam Utsav Aarti

Saturday, March 28 (8:00 PM)
Kamada Ekadashi
Pooja & Aarti

Weekly Events

EVERY MONDAY - 6:30 PM
• SHIV ABHISHEK AND PUJA

EVERY TUESDAY - 7:00 PM
• SUNDERKAND PATH
• HANUMAN CHALISA

EVERY THURSDAY - 7:00 PM
• ALL SADGURU & SHIRDI SAI BABA
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NEW GUIDELINES ON DIET AND NUTRITION

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



2025-2030 edition of Dietary Guidelines for Americans (USDGA) was released on Jan. 7, 2026, to Make America Healthy Again (MAHA). The government puts out new editions once every five years.

The preamble states that nearly 90 percent of cost of health care is spent on management of chronic illnesses. Most of these disorders are attributable to unhealthy diet and sedentary lifestyle. The intent of the new guidelines is admirable, even though there could be room for debate about certain specific food items that were recommended.

Ultra-processed food: The biggest emphasis is to cut down on ultra-processed food, which has become all too common in our society. These food items are made by using industrial techniques, packaged and prepared, ready to eat with added sugar and salt, along with preservatives, emulsifiers, flavors and colors. They are convenient, cheap, tasty and make you eat more. They are high in calories, low in fiber and are proven to cause type 2 diabetes mellitus, cardiovascular disorders, obesity, cancers, stroke, atherosclerosis, cognitive decline and depression. This advice is good since ultra-processed food is found to be responsible for chronic illnesses.

Proteins: The next emphasis is on taking much more proteins than previous recommendations. To obtain further proteins, this guideline encourages consumption of red meat and whole dairy products along with proteins in vegetables, nuts and legumes. This is open for debate since adequate quantity of proteins is already met in normal diet. Red meat is causative of many health issues resulting in cancers, constipation and colorectal problems, and increased atherosclerosis. Hence, this endorsement must be questioned and analyzed.

Sugar: Third recommendation is to reduce sugar and salt intake as much as possible. This includes all cola, fruit and energy drinks, snacks, cookies, candies, doughnuts, pastries, ice cream and sweet desserts. They will add to calories and increase chance of metabolic complications. Parents are urged to avoid giving any type of sugar for children under four years of age. Reducing sugar is also a good recommendation.

Alcohol: Next item is about reducing alcohol consumption. Previous recommendation was to take no more than two drinks a day for men and one drink per day for women. Current recommendation does not specify a quantity but asks one to reduce it as much as possible. While alcohol in any form is bad, strict prohibition is difficult to implement without controlling the industry.

Fats: Another item is healthy fats, recommended with eggs, seafood, meat, poultry, nuts, seeds, olives and avocado. Certain recommended items such as meat, beef tallow, butter, whole milk, full fat dairy products and cheese are open for disagreement. Many would consider these as unhealthy. Other scientific studies suggest reduction

of saturated fats and providing moderate amounts of polyunsaturated fats. Method of cooking baked instead of fried food is better.

Carbohydrates: Finally, the list advocates whole grains, cereals, legumes and vegetables, but they are placed at the bottom of the preference list. In the past, these used to be at the top. Among the whole grains, brown rice, oats, quinoa, farro and whole wheat are included. Prior studies had recommended 50 percent of the nutrient from carbohydrates. Subtly, the endorsement appears to reduce carbohydrates and increase proteins instead.

In summary, the new guidelines are a mixed set of suggestions, some are good and some questionable. It is up to each individual to be informed and choose wisely and carefully and decide what to eat and not to eat. Everyone may have personal preferences, but we need to place science over politics.

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.

EVENTS

Cont'd from page 2

FORT MYERS/NAPLES

MARCH 14: 35TH INDIA FEST; presented by India Association of Fort Myers (IAFM); Alliance for the Arts, 10091 McGregor Blvd., Fort Myers; noon to 8 p.m.; Indian food, dance, henna, music, handicrafts and clothing; for information, email indiafest@iafortmyers.org or visit <https://www.iaftmyers.org/>



MARCH 28: KATHAK DANCE; performer is Barkha Patel; presented by RAAGA to celebrate its 10-year anniversary; Alliance for the Arts, 10091 McGregor Blvd., Fort Myers; 5 to 8 p.m.; \$50 for show/dinner (Indian Breeze restaurant) adult members, \$75 non-members, children over 12 are \$10; purchase tickets at www.raagafl.org

MELBOURNE/COCOA

MARCH 7-8: 29TH ANNUAL INDIAFEST; presented by Manav Mandir; Wickham Park, 2500 Parkway Drive, Melbourne; 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Saturday and 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday; \$8 for adults, \$4 for children 12 and under; kids younger than 5 years are free; cultural and fashion shows, henna, arts and crafts, Indian cooking demo, food, raffle drawings, etc.; for information, call Nina Gadodia at (321) 779-0110, e-mail info@indiafestbrevard.org or visit www.indiafestbrevard.org

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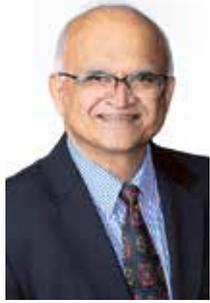
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GOOD NEWS FOR RELIGIOUS WORKER IMMIGRATION - PART II

By KHUSHBU PATEL and DILIP PATEL



Why Was This Change Necessary?

The demand for visas in the EB-4 category has historically outpaced supply, especially for religious workers from certain countries. Changes by the Department of State in 2023 further compounded delays, leading to extended periods where religious workers could not return or obtain permanent residence. These delays threaten the stability of religious organizations, which rely heavily on clergy and religious professionals to serve their communities.

By removing the residency requirement, the goal is to:

- Reduce wait times for religious workers.
- Preserve the integrity of religious service delivery.
- Support religious organizations' vital roles in social and moral support.

Legal and Practical Implications

It's important to note that while the rule relaxes the residency requirement, it does not eliminate the need for religious workers to depart the United States after their maximum stay — rather, it removes the additional waiting period before reentry.

Religious organizations will benefit from quicker reintegration of clergy and religious workers, ensuring continuity of services such as pastoral care, education and community outreach. For the workers themselves, it reduces the uncertainty and hardship associated with prolonged periods outside the United States.

Final Thoughts: A Step Forward

This policy change marks a significant step toward easing the burden on religious workers and their communities.

From a legal perspective, this rule represents a pragmatic and positive step. It recognizes the essential role of religious workers in American society and seeks to streamline their ability to serve communities without unnecessary delays. However, as with any policy change, careful implementation and oversight are vital. It is important to note that while the rule provides immediate benefits, ongoing discussions about immigration reform and visa supply remain relevant. The government's efforts to streamline processes and prioritize religious workers reflect a broader recognition of their essential contributions.

In conclusion, the Department of Homeland Security's decision to eliminate the one-year foreign residency requirement is a noteworthy example of administrative law evolving to meet societal needs. It highlights the delicate balance between immigration regulation, religious freedom, and administrative efficiency — an area where legal expertise remains essential.

For further questions or legal assistance related to immigration and religious worker visas, contact a qualified immigration attorney to navigate the evolving legal landscape.

Cont'd on page 18

TAKING CONTROL WITH SELF-DIRECTED IRAS



By TEJAL DHRUVE, CPA

You have until April 15, 2026, the tax filing deadline, to make 2025 contributions to an IRA. If you're seeking more than the traditional mix of stocks, bonds and mutual funds, a self-directed IRA offers greater autonomy and diversification. But it also introduces added complexity.

Put Investment Decisions in Your Hands

A self-directed IRA is simply an IRA that provides greater control over investment decisions. Traditional and Roth IRAs typically offer a selection of stocks, bonds and mutual funds. Self-directed IRAs (available at certain financial institutions) offer greater diversification and potentially

higher returns by permitting you to select virtually any type of investment, including real estate, closely held stock, precious metals and commodities (such as lumber, oil and gas).

A self-directed IRA can be a traditional or Roth IRA, a Simplified Employee Pension (SEP), or a Savings Incentive Match Plan for Employees (SIMPLE). But be aware that additional rules and different deadlines apply to SEP and SIMPLE IRAs.

Steer Clear of Tax Mistakes

To avoid pitfalls that can lead to unwanted tax consequences, exercise caution with self-directed IRAs. The most dangerous traps are the prohibited transaction rules. They're designed to limit dealings between an IRA and "disqualified persons," including account holders, certain members of their families, businesses controlled by account holders or their families, and certain IRA advisors or service providers.

Among other things, disqualified persons can't sell property or lend money to the IRA, buy property from the IRA, provide goods or services to the IRA, guarantee a loan to the IRA, pledge IRA assets as security for a loan, receive compensation from the IRA, or personally use IRA assets. This makes it nearly impossible for an IRA owner to actively manage a business or real estate held in a self-directed IRA.

The penalty for engaging in a prohibited transaction is severe: The IRA is disqualified, and its assets are deemed to have been distributed on the first day of the year in which the transaction took place, subject to income taxes and potentially penalties.

Is It the Right Fit?

A self-directed IRA can be a powerful tool if you're looking to diversify beyond traditional markets. But it's not a strategy to adopt lightly. Knowing the rules, risks and responsibilities is crucial before moving retirement assets into alternative investments. Have questions? Contact the office.

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

Inspiration Series – 066/550 read the serialized badge imprinted on the center console of our LC convertible, a copious frills and high-performance ride, all rolled into one. For 2026, Lexus has introduced a new edition for its supercar and we were thrilled to be driving No. 66 of the just 550 produced for the North American market. Essentially, the series comes with a wind exterior coupled with a brown/silver top, climate concierge, head-up display, Mark Levinson sound system, special door scuff plate, front bumper canards, limited slip rear differential and rear performance rod.



LC500 (INSPIRATION SERIES)

Tires: 245/40R21 front, 275/35R21 rear
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Length: 187.4 inches
Width: 75.6 inches
Height: 53.2 inches
Suspension: double wishbone front, multilink rear
Steering: speed-sensing electric power
Weight: 4,500 pounds
Fuel capacity: 21.7 gallons
City/hwy/comb: 15/25/18 mpg
Base price: \$107,750
Price as tested: \$120,370
Web site: www.lexus.com

Sharing its engine with the now-defunct Lexus RC-F, the LC500 can take off from 0 to 60 mph in a mere 4.6 seconds topping speed at 168 mph. The 5.0-liter V-8 engine in the powerful midsize luxury convertible blasts off 471 horsepower @ 7100 rpm and 398 pounds-feet of torque @ 4800 rpm. The rear-wheel-drive ride is mated to a forceful but smooth 10-speed auto gearbox. Providing positive brake feel are 15.7-inch vented front and 14.1-inch rear discs equipped with six- and four-piston Brembo calipers respectively. To watch the unfolding of the power soft top, which takes 15 seconds to open and another 16 to close at up to 31 mph, is like poetry in motion.

Up front, a mammoth mesh, blacked-out spindle grille is flanked by arrowhead LED daytime running lights with triple-beam LED headlights to indicate that this is indeed a speed demon. LEDs also deck up the rear, side signal, corner and

tail lamps. Step into the well-appointed cabin and you will find an eye-catching shifter knob adorned in leather and satin-plated bezels while gas/brake pedals and footrests show off aluminum. Satin metallic finish touch is evident throughout. Niceties include eight-way power cooled/heated front seats, wind deflector/screen, push-button start, drive mode selector, power and heated tilt/telescopic steering column, wireless Android Auto and Apple CarPlay and dual auto a/c. A 12.3-inch touch display with clearly accessible infotainment controls towers over the dashboard and console. As for the back seat, don't bother. It's more for show than for holding even a toddler!

With its power-at-all-times engine for lead-foot drivers and elegant styling inside and out, this high-end sports convertible speaks for itself. Indeed, it is one of a kind, i.e., if the 100g price tag is of little consequence.

2026 TOYOTA PRIUS NIGHTSHADE PLUG-IN CAN GO A LONG DISTANCE!

Last year, we test-drove the fuel-efficient and agile Toyota Prius hybrid Nightshade trim. And for 2026, Toyota dispatched us over the world's first mass-produced hybrid, but this one a plug-in hybrid (PHEV). Essentially, it means the car can go the first 39 miles on pure electric, thanks to a 13.6 kWh lithium-ion battery and two electric motors, before the gas engine kicks in. Another 500 miles on fuel alone and you are looking at almost 550 miles before needing to plug in or fill gas. The charge port uses a 240-volt system that can take about four hours or a 120-volt consuming nearly 11 hours.

Under the hood of the all-wheel-drive Prius PHEV sits a 2.0-liter inline-4-cylinder engine that puts out a healthy 220 horsepower and 139 pounds-feet of torque. Translation? Zero to 60 mph is possible in just 6.6 seconds. Power routed through the continuously variable transmission gives acceptable performance. Suspension handled by an independent MacPherson strut front and multilink rear does a remarkably good job of smoothening bumps and potholes.

The electric power steering returns a weighted direct response to the driver's input. It operates in normal, sport and eco modes as well as auto EV/HV and EV, which is electric at lower speeds of up to 25 mph.

Making this economical and cool fifth-gen hatchback an attention-grabber is the Karashi (yellow) that comes in the Nightshade edition. It's a blacked-out ride all the way – dark front grille, badging, bumper, door handles, side window trim, door sills, shark fin antenna and even alloy wheels. A welcome feature is carbon-fiber detail scattered all around the dashboard to give the cabin an inviting look. There is an 8-inch (12.3 is optional) infotainment touchscreen display for audio and phone controls as well as a 7-inch digital



PRIUS NIGHTSHADE
Tires: P195/50 R19
Wheelbase: 108.3 inches
Length: 181.1 inches
Width: 70.2 inches
Height: 56.3 inches
Weight: 3,285 pounds
Fuel capacity: 10.5 gallons
Mileage: 48 mpg gas only; 114 MPGe
Base price: \$37,795
Price as tested: \$40,985
Web site: www.toyota.com

gauge cluster. The driver and front passenger are coddled by heated eight-way power and six-way manual synthetic leather seats respectively. A single auto a/c, heated tilt/telescopic steering wheel, push-button start, 60/40 rear seat, six USB-C ports, wireless phone charger/Android Auto and Apple CarPlay, and six speakers come at no extra cost.

If a pure electric vehicle isn't your ride of choice because of range anxiety or other concerns, the Prius PHEV certainly deserves attention. It may not be a speedster but a combination of thrift (price wise as well as frugal use of fuel), practicality and fun to drive make this a best buy in our eyes.

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HAPPY HOLI

FESTIVAL OF COLORS

More communities celebrating the festival of colors in Florida:

Cont'd from page 1

TAMPA/PLANT CITY/ZEPHYRHILLS/WESLEY CHAPEL

MARCH 1: Florida Holi Mela; organized by UrbanCraftShip; Sickles High School, 7950 Gunn Highway, Tampa; 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.; \$10 per person; purchase tickets at www.floridaholimela.com

MARCH 1: organized by Maayboli Melawa Tampa Bay (Marathi association); picnic; Sickles High School, 7950 Gunn Highway, Tampa; 11 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.; free for members, \$20 non-members; for information, visit www.mmtbusa.org or email secretary@mmtbusa.org

MARCH 2: Satyanarayan pooja and Holika Dahan; Shree Raam Mandir, 7411 E. Comanche Ave., Tampa; 6 p.m.; for information, call Angela at (813) 842-4447.

MARCH 7: organized by KRATE, 5817 Goldview Parkway, Wesley Chapel; 4:30 to 9 p.m.; for information, email ContactUs@exchangegrp.com or via the KRATE social media contact inbox

MARCH 7: presented by Tampa Indian Community Events, organized by Bharti Kapoor Panigrahi; Sisira Farms - The Aura Venue, 10575 Paul S. Buchman Highway, Plant City; 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.; discounted tickets of \$10 on sale until Feb 10 and available for purchase on Sulekha.com or via Zelle at (813) 893-9779.

LAKELAND/BARTOW

MARCH 2: Holi Dahan; Shree Swaminarayan Hindu Temple (ISSO), 2793 New Tampa Highway, Lakeland; 7 p.m.; for information, call (863) 529-1146 or visit www.issolakeland.org

MARCH 3: Holika Dahan; organized by Bhartiya Samaj of Central Florida; 7 p.m.; Mary Holland Park, 2015 Shumate Drive, Bartow; for information, visit <https://www.bscl.com>

BRADENTON/SARASOTA

MARCH 7: organized by Indian Association of Manasota; Lake Manatee State Park, 20007 FL 64, Bradenton; 1 to 4 p.m.; lunch will be served; members and kids 5 years and younger free; guest adult \$30; student \$20; for information, visit <https://indianassociationofmanasota.com/>

ORLANDO/CASSELBERRY

MARCH 2 and MARCH 8: on March 2, Holika puja organized by Gujarati Society of Central Florida; 6:30 p.m.; bring your own pooja thali; Shree Laxminarayan Mandir, 5020 W. South St., Orlando; free; on March 8, Dhuleti held from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Olympia High School, 4301 S. Apopka Vineland Road, Orlando; free for members, \$25 non-members; for information, email info@gujaratisocietycfl.com or visit www.gujaratisocietycfl.com

SOUTH FLORIDA (MIRAMAR/MIAMI/LAKE WORTH)

MARCH 8: organized by Miami Association of Indian Americans for Culture and Arts (MAIACA); Kendall Hammocks Park, 11395 S.W. 79th St., Miami; 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.; adults \$15, kids ages 5-12 are \$10; for information, visit <https://www.maiaca.org/>

MARCH 8: presented by Palm Beach India Association; John Prince Park, Smythe Pavilion, 4759 S. Congress Ave., Lake Worth; 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.; free for members, \$10 non-members; visit www.gopbia.org

ORLANDO SET TO SIZZLE: "UNITED GUJARATI CONVENTION 2026" IS COMING MEMORIAL DAY WEEKEND!

By MALAY SHAH

Prepare to witness history in the making! This Memorial Day weekend, the "Theme Park Capital of the World" transforms into the vibrant heart of the Gujarati diaspora as Orlando proudly hosts the United Gujarati Convention 2026.

From May 22-25, thousands will gather under the inspiring vision of "One United Voice," a massive collaborative effort led by the Federation of Gujarati Associations of USA (FOGAUSA) and local Florida Gujarati societies. Under the leadership of Convention Chairman Jayesh Patel (Gujarati Society of Central Florida), this four-day extravaganza promises to be the most prestigious cultural and professional summit of the year.



Jayesh Patel

A Festival for Every Generation

This isn't just another convention; it's a high-octane celebration designed to ignite passion across all ages. The convention floor will be buzzing with:

- Business Trade Shows & Networking: Connecting the brightest business minds in the industry for G2G (Gujarati-to-Gujarati) trade.
- The "Gujju Capital Tank": Where aspiring entrepreneurs pitch the next big idea.
- Empowerment Summits: Dedicated tracks for women leaders, youth, and seniors.
- Matrimonial, Culture & Connection: High-profile matrimonial sessions and world-class entertainment.
- Youth & Kids: Activities by and for the Gujju youth & kids.
- Entertainment: Garba, music and comedy in true Gujju fashion.

Global Influence, Local Pride

The event is set to draw a "Who's Who" of attendees, including top-tier dignitaries from the Government of Gujarat and influential speakers from across the United States.

"Florida has been entrusted with this incredible responsibility," says the Florida Convention team. "Volunteers from every corner of the Sunshine State are working tirelessly to ensure this experience is nothing short of legendary."

Unbeatable Perks for Attendees!

In addition to bringing the Gujju community together, organizers making sure guests enjoy the best of Florida while here! To make the event truly unforgettable, registered attendees will have access to exclusive, deeply discounted hotel rooms right in the heart of the action.

Planning to extend your stay? Discounted theme park tickets for Orlando's world-famous attractions and even discounted cruise tickets for those looking to set sail after the convention will be made available.

Don't Miss the Magic!

Registration is officially live and seats are filling up fast as interest pours in from coast to coast.

- When: May 22-25 (Memorial Day Weekend)
- Where: Renaissance (SeaWorld) Orlando
- More info and registration: www.FOGAUSA.org

Join the movement, follow the updates on social media, and help us make Memorial Day 2026 truly memorial!



Malay Shah of Lakeland is FOGAUSA Web & Social Media Chair. FOGAUSA was established in 2021 with a vision to connect all Gujaratis living in United States of America and provide a platform as "one united voice of Gujaratis". With membership of all major Gujarati associations in USA, this platform is a rich source of information, connectivity, resources, and connections. With over 90 member organizations from all corners of USA touching the minds and hearts of more than a million Gujaratis, FOGAUSA is the voice of Gujaratis in USA and largest Gujarati Association federation in the world.



Federation of Gujarati Associations of USA (FOGAUSA)

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- Gujju Capital Tank - Entrepreneur Pitch & Funding
- Golf Tournament
- Robotics, Science, Art & Rangoli Showcase
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- Senior Programs - Drama & Karaoke
- Entertainment - Laughter Show & Musical Night with Famed Artists



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A S T R O L O G Y

MARCH FORECAST

By PANKAJ KOHLI



ARIES / Mesha (Fire sign, ruling planet is Mars) - (March 21-April 20) Mars Sign – Stars covered Ashwini, Bharani, Krittika (1st Part) March emphasizes thoughtful action over impulse. Planetary positions encourage balancing courage with patience. Professional matters may demand calculated decisions rather than quick reactions. Financial growth is possible through structured planning and avoiding unnecessary risk. Health benefits from disciplined routines and proper rest. The month supports channeling energy productively and maintaining emotional control while preparing for fresh beginnings toward the end of the month.

TAURUS / Vrushabha (Earthen sign, ruling planet is Venus) - (April 21-May 21) Venus Sign - Stars covered Krittika (last 3 parts), Rohini, Mrigashira (first 2 parts) The month brings focus on stability and measured expansion. Professional responsibilities may increase, but steady performance earns appreciation. Financial matters show gradual improvement when investments are reviewed carefully. Venus enhances harmony in relationships, encouraging deeper bonding and positive affirmations. Health remains stable with attention to proper diet and routine. The month supports practical growth, emotional maturity and building long-term foundations.

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) Mercury, the lord of the sign, sharpens communication skills and intellectual agility. However, planetary shifts advise avoiding over-analysis. Professional progress occurs through timely decisions. Financial gains depend on timely responsiveness and honoring past commitments. Relationships benefit through sincere conversation and exchange of emotional feelings. The month encourages honest communication, adaptability and applying knowledge effectively.

CANCER / Kataka (Watery sign, ruling planet is Moon) - (June 22-July 22) Moon Sign – Stars covered Punarvasu (4th part), Pushya, Aslesha The month highlights focus on emotional maturity and responsibility. Professional matters demand steady effort and calm responses to challenges. Family interactions demand calm expression and understanding. Financial matters improve through budgeting and avoiding emotional spending. Spiritual practice brings inner peace. The month supports nurturing others while maintaining personal boundaries and emotional stability.

LEO / Simha (Fire sign, ruling planet is Sun) - (July 23-Aug. 22) Sun Sign – Stars covered Magha, Purva Phalguni, Uttara Phalguni (1st part) The month enhances leadership qualities and visibility. With the Sun's movement, recognition comes with consistent effort and integrity. Professional opportunities arise through confident yet ethical conduct. Financial prospects strengthen through responsible management. Relationships flourish when pride is balanced with generosity. The month supports confidence, structured ambition and purposeful action.

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) The month of March favors refinement and organized effort. Professional growth comes from revisiting details and improvising ideas. Financial matters stabilize with disciplined monitoring. Health benefits from structured routine and balanced nutrition. Emotional harmony improves through flexibility and acceptance. The month supports methodical progress and intelligent adjustments according to circumstances.

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) The month focuses on maintaining harmony in both personal and professional life. Career partnerships may bring productive developments. Financial decisions require weighing options carefully before committing. Venus supports warmth and understanding in relationships. Artistic or creative pursuits bring satisfaction. The month maintains balance, fairness and graceful handling of responsibilities.

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MARCH FORECAST

Cont'd from page 12

SCORPIO / Vruschika (Water sign, ruling planet is Mars) - (Oct. 24-Nov. 22)
Mars Sign - Stars covered Vishakha (4th part), Anuradha, Jyestha The month brings intensified focus and strategic thinking. Professional advancement is possible through determined and disciplined effort. Financial matters require calculated planning rather than emotional decisions. Relationships grow stronger through honesty and trust. Inner transformation continues steadily with patience. March supports self-control and constructive action.

SAGITTARIUS / Dhanush (Fire sign, ruling planet is Jupiter) - (Nov. 23-Dec. 21)
Jupiter Sign - Stars covered Moola, Purva Shada, Uttara Shada (first part) The month encourages expansion through wisdom and careful direction. Professional growth is supported by learning new skills and constant improvement of goals. Financial stability improves when expectations remain realistic. Relationships strengthen through shared beliefs and honest communication. March brings in optimism guided by practical planning and emotional clarity.

CAPRICORN / Makara (Earthen sign, ruling planet is Saturn) - (Dec. 22-Jan. 20)
Saturn Sign - Stars covered Uttara Shada (last 3 parts) Shravana, Dhanistha (first 2 parts) The month strengthens perseverance and accountability. Professional efforts bring measurable results when approached methodically. Financial stability improves through disciplined saving and cautious spending. Relationships require patience, warmth and shared responsibility. Saturn's influence supports endurance and structured achievements. March favors practical planning and consistent effort.

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) The month highlights innovation with responsibility. Professional ideas gain success when practically implemented. Financial matters benefit from strategic review and cautious expansion. Emotional bonds deepen through sincerity and shared ideals. March encourages aligning long-term vision with disciplined action.

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 The month enhances intuition and compassionate leadership. Professional matters progress through creativity and calm guidance. Financial situations improve

gradually, bringing relief and steadiness. Relationships deepen through empathy and emotional understanding. March backs healing, emotional clarity and gentle but steady progress toward meaningful goals.

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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SPRING, SCREENS AND SIGHT: WHAT YOUR EYES ARE TELLING YOU THIS MARCH

By DR. ARUN GULANI



March is a month of quiet change. The light shifts. The days stretch a little longer. We begin driving more at dawn and dusk, spending more time outdoors and re-engaging with routines that demand visual endurance — work, screens, reading and travel. For many people, it is also the time when their eyes begin to feel different.

Some notice mild blur that comes and goes. Others experience glare while driving, irritation they blame on allergies, or eyes that simply feel tired sooner than they used

to. Most dismiss these changes as seasonal or age-related and move on.

After decades of caring for eyes at every stage — from perfectly healthy to profoundly complex — I can say with confidence that eyes rarely complain without reason. They tend to whisper long before they shout. And spring is often when those whispers begin.

The truth is that vision is far more than reading letters on a chart. Seeing clearly is only one part of how the visual system functions. Our eyes must work together, focus effortlessly on different distances, tolerate light and glare, maintain a healthy surface, and do all of this for hours at a time without fatigue. When even one part of that system begins to strain, the brain works harder to compensate. That effort shows up as headaches, eye strain, fluctuating clarity, light sensitivity, or a sense that “something just isn’t quite right.”

This is why many people tell me they can still see well yet feel visually uncomfortable. That distinction matters.

Spring tends to expose these subtle imbalances. Increased sunlight reveals glare issues that went unnoticed during darker months. Longer daylight extends screen use. Seasonal allergies disrupt the delicate tear film that keeps vision clear and comfortable. Dry indoor air lingers, blinking decreases, and eyes that have been quietly compensating finally reach their limit.

Dry eye, in particular, is one of the most overlooked contributors to visual problems, even in spring. Watery eyes do not necessarily mean healthy eyes. In fact, allergy-related tearing often washes away the very components that keep the eye’s surface stable. Add prolonged screen use and certain medications, and vision can fluctuate despite otherwise “good eyesight.” People are often surprised to learn that dry eyes affect not just comfort, but the quality of vision itself — especially in bright light and at night.

Another common misconception I encounter is that cataracts only become relevant when vision is clearly impaired. In reality, cataract changes begin quietly. Early cataracts often affect contrast, color perception, and glare long before they cause an obvious blur. Many people adapt without realizing how much visual quality they’ve lost, adjusting their habits instead of addressing the cause. Modern eye care allows us to identify these changes early and guide patients thoughtfully, rather than waiting for vision to decline unnecessarily.

The same is true for vision correction in general. Whether someone is considering updating glasses, exploring laser vision correction, or simply understanding their long-term eye health, the most important step is not choosing a procedure — it is choosing a careful, experienced evaluation. Eyes are not identical, and meaningful vision care has never been one-size-fits-all. The best outcomes come from understanding how a person’s eyes function as a system and planning accordingly.

What concerns me most is how often people normalize visual discomfort. Eye strain is brushed off. Headaches are tolerated. Night driving is avoided. Screens are endured. These are not badges of aging; they are signals. Addressing them early is almost always easier — and more effective — than waiting.

Around the world, I see the same pattern repeated: people wish they had come sooner. Not because something went wrong, but because it could have been simpler. Vision is deeply personal. It shapes how we work, connect, move and enjoy life. Protecting it requires attention, timing, and experience.

As spring arrives, I encourage people to pause and listen to their eyes. Be aware of subtle changes. Don’t dismiss discomfort. Understand the role of dry eye. Learn where you stand with cataracts, even if they are early so you can take advantage of technological advances in multifocal and trifocal lens implants to seek vision freedom without glasses.

Seek thoughtful guidance when considering vision correction whether you are nearsighted, farsighted or have astigmatism or reading vision issue. And above all, choose care based on judgment and experience, not convenience.

Your eyes are with you every waking moment. Giving them the respect they deserve is one of the most meaningful investments you can make — not just for this season, but for the years ahead.

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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THE BRIDGE TO COLLEGE

THE EMOTIONS OF COLLEGE ADMISSIONS

By **ALEEZA SUGOTO** and **ROBERT A.G. LEVINE**



This month's story comes from Aleeza Sugoto, our student who already has good options, is still waiting for her first-choice school to make its decision and has others also considering her. No doubt, admissions season is an emotional roller coaster.

“The first time I submitted an application was stressful. ‘Oh My God! I’m actually applying to a university!’ You’re going to be overthinking things a lot. I even reviewed the PDF of my application after I submitted it! Although with each application it slowly gets better, it’s still nerve-wracking.

“Waiting for university decisions can feel like living inside a slow-moving clock. Every day is filled with anticipation, doubt,

and hope. One minute you’re confident, and the next you’re questioning every word of your Personal Statement. You’ll feel restless, and at times you’ll want to know the results now! Even though I am well aware that they haven’t announced anything yet, I keep looking at my phone to figure out when each school’s decisions are coming out.

“To keep yourself sane, trust in the effort and the work you put in. Trust in the hours you spent writing your story, deciding how to frame yourself, and choosing what to highlight. Re-read your essays, embrace your last months with your friends, and (try to) enjoy the moment.

“There’s no doubt that parents are also engulfed by the madness. While you have to deal with your emotions, you also have to deal with theirs. I get along pretty well with my family, but it’s stressful when they keep asking me what’s going on. ‘Have you gotten anything back? When are you going to get something back?!’ The best way to minimize your parents’ stress is to give them reassurance. Inform them what’s going on and remind them that you will definitely let them know as soon as you do.

“At school, I’ve seen a mix of affectations. Some people are overly confident, while others downplay the stress by claiming ‘we’ll just see what happens.’ When Early decisions started coming out, there were a lot of deferrals and rejections, but barely any acceptances, especially for the Top 20 schools. Everyone congratulates the few who got accepted, but you’ll find yourself empathizing with the people who didn’t get in and wondering why that happened. There was one person with an insane list of activities ... the number of things he does outside of school is crazy ... but he didn’t get in.

“So, based upon what I have seen, I don’t think applying Early really gives you any extra boost. You should only apply Early Decision if you for sure want that school because, if they take you, then you don’t have a choice. I have talked to some people who were accepted ED1 but are not entirely happy because there’s this monstrous ‘what if’ for the university options that suddenly disappeared. No doubt, being bound by an Early ‘win’ can cause disappointment.

“So, here’s some advice. First, be smart about your list of universities. There’s a lot of factors to take into account. Although it’s very popular to reach for the name brand, don’t apply just because of that. Ask yourself: does the school actually fit me? And be sure not to try for too many reaches.

“Second, consider applying first to a non-binding school even though it may not be your dream. One acceptance is enough to change everything. A single ‘yes’ lifts the weight of stress and uncertainty. My friends who do not have a school yet? Their minds are all over the place! Having one secured in your pocket is such a relief, and the confidence of an acceptance makes it easier to do your best work for your favorite schools.

“Third, start writing your essays early. Don’t do them too close to the deadline. You’re going to have a lot of different schools to write supplemental essays for, and if your mind is jumping around all over the place, you won’t execute very well.

“Personally, I really enjoyed researching the schools and writing their specific essays. Although I couldn’t at first, I can now clearly see the differences in the schools by carefully reviewing the websites. It’s really interesting! And as part of the process, I got to know myself better, which gives me a level of knowledge for my own self-growth. Knowing the person I want to be, I can now maneuver myself in the right directions.”

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.universityco.com

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HONDA CR-V GETS WORTHY, SPORTY ALL-TERRAIN TRAILSPOUR EDITION!

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

Introduced over three decades ago, it has been the best-selling crossover for the last 28 years as well as the top Honda seller since 2017. The Comfortable Runabout Vehicle or CR-V, as everyone knows it, gets an all-new TrailSport edition. After creating a record with over 400,000 sales in 2024 and last year, we would not be surprised if that number increases drastically again.

Under the hood of the sixth-gen CR-V hybrid sits a 2.0-liter direct-injection, 4-cylinder turbocharged engine that puts out a healthy 204 horsepower and 247 pounds-feet of torque. It is paired with dual electric motors and a lithium-ion

battery pack for substantial fuel savings. A continuous variable transmission shifts effortlessly and quietly. Suspension handled by a MacPherson strut front and multilink rear does an admirable job of soaking up potholes and other road unevenness. Conveying tremendous on-center feel and effective feedback is an electric-power rack-and-pinion steering. Enhanced low-speed traction management serves to aid in navigating bumpy terrain. Drive modes include normal, eco, sport and snow.

The CR-V gains a pleasing and attractive all-new Ash Green metallic exterior color. Horizontal LED headlights flank a mesh black grille with a silver skid garnish. TrailSport badges can be found in the SUV's front and rear, on the front seat backrests and floor mats. Step inside the cozy and roomy cabin (103.5 cubic feet of passenger space) and the driver will face a bigger 10.2-inch digital cluster and a 9-inch infotainment screen. Standard for 2026 are a phone charger, Android Auto and Apple CarPlay, all wireless. Extending across the dashboard is a honeycomb mesh with disguised silver air vents.



CR-V AWD (TRAILSPOUR)

Tires: 235/60R18
Wheelbase: 106.3 inches
Length: 184.8 inches
Width: 73.5 inches
Height: 66.5 inches
Weight: 3,900 pounds
Fuel capacity: 14 gallons
City/hwy/comb: 38/33/35 mpg
Base price: \$40,250
Web site: www.honda.com



Looking to haul cargo? Just fold the 60/40 seat down with levers in the tailgate.

Orange ambient lights throughout and orange stitching on the black seats

are a fine touch. Ten-way heated driver and four-way front-passenger power seats, 320-watt audio with eight speakers, push-button start, dual auto a/c, tilt/telescopic steering column, hands-free power lift gate/moonroof, and sunglass holder come at no extra cost.

If you are looking to traverse rough ground in a compact SUV, then the TrailSport model is a smart and right pick. It is roomy, comfortable, good-looking, practical, fuel efficient (we earned over 38 combined mpg) and now snazzy with this all-new trim added to the CR-V lineup.

USCIS ANNOUNCES FY 2027 H-1B REGISTRATION DATES — WHAT EMPLOYERS NEED TO KNOW

Cont'd from page 6

The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has officially announced that the FY 2027 H-1B cap registration period will open on March 4, 2026, at 12 p.m. and close at on March 19, 2026, at 12 p.m. During this window, employers must electronically register each beneficiary through a USCIS online account and pay the \$215 registration fee per beneficiary.

Selections will take place after the registration period closes, and USCIS intends to notify selected petitioners by March 31, 2026, through their online accounts.

What Employers Should Do Now

- Don't have a USCIS online account? Petitioning employers must create an organizational account before registering beneficiaries.
- Are you working with an attorney or representative? Representatives may add company clients anytime, but beneficiary information and fee payments cannot be submitted until March 4.
- Important reminder: Employers may only file an H-1B cap-subject petition if the beneficiary's registration is selected.

What's New for FY 2027?

This year introduces a significant policy shift. Under a newly published Department of Homeland Security final rule, USCIS will implement a weighted selection system if registrations exceed the annual cap. The new process prioritizes higher-skilled and higher-paid beneficiaries.

Potential Additional Costs

A Presidential Proclamation issued on Sept. 19, 2025, may also impact employers — particularly for beneficiaries applying at a U.S. Consulate or port of entry, or those who have not maintained their status in the United States. While it does not change the electronic registration process, selected petitioners may be required to pay an additional \$100,000 fee before filing the H-1B petition, depending on eligibility conditions.

For additional questions on the H-1B registration process and navigating important deadlines, it is important to contact a skilled immigration attorney.

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

TIKARAM UNVEILS PAAN LIQUEUR: A BOLD FUSION OF HERITAGE AND INDULGENCE

TAMPA, FL — November 1, 2025 – TikaRam Spirits, the South Asian inspired premium spirits brand known for blending tradition with innovation, proudly announces the launch of TikaRam Paan Liqueur, the first-ever craft spirit to capture the bold, nostalgic flavor of Paan in a refined, world-class liqueur.

Infused with the vibrant flavors of rose, cardamom, fennel, Gulkand, and spices. TikaRam Paan Liqueur pays tribute to the post-meal ritual cherished across generations, yet designed to enhance modern cocktails. This Paan liqueur blends craftsmanship and culture into a single, unforgettable sip. "This isn't just a drink — it's a statement," says Vidita aka "Tika", Co-Founder of TikaRam Spirits. "With TikaRam Paan Liqueur, we're showcasing the flavors of our heritage and presenting them to the world with elegance, luxury, authenticity, and unapologetic pride."

Key Features:

Crafted Flavor: Authentic notes of traditional Paan, refined through ultra-premium distillation.

Heritage and Innovation: where science meets nostalgia.

Versatile Profile: Ideal for sipping, mixing, and flavor enhancing, or elevating desserts and chai.



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