

KHAASBAAT

A PUBLICATION FOR INDIAN AMERICANS IN FLORIDA

WWW.KHAASBAAT.COM

EDITOR@KHAASBAAT.COM

FEBRUARY 2026

813-758-1786

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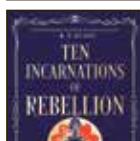
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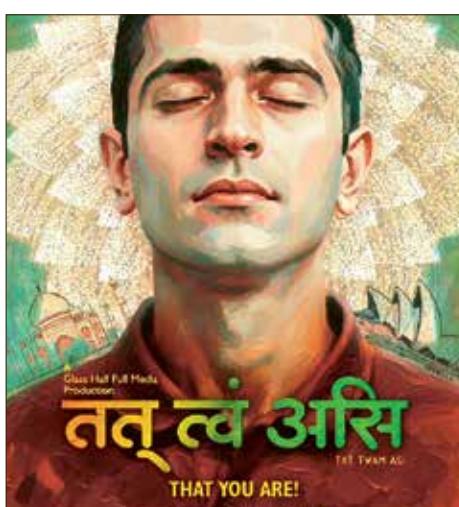
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GEAR UP FOR INDIA FESTIVALS ALL OVER FLORIDA!

MELBOURNE MARCH 7-8 • GAINESVILLE MARCH 7 • FORT MYERS MARCH 14

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SOUTH ASIAN
INDIAN
FILM FEST

FEB. 20-22
IN TAMPA
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WHO'S WHO

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

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EVENTS

TAMPA/ST. PETERSBURG/PLANT CITY

FEB. 1: EAST-WEST MUSIC AND DANCE

FESTIVAL; organized by Shruti Foundation; 1 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

FEB. 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.

FEB. 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.

FEB. 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.

FEB. 20-22: 3rd ANNUAL SOUTH ASIAN INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL OF FLORIDA (SAIFFF); NCG Cinemas, 7999 Citrus Park Town Center Mall, Tampa; to purchase tickets, visit www.saiff.org or call (312) 933-2251.

FEB. 21: "PARAMPARA: A CONTINUATION OF MUSICAL TRADITION;" presented by Sangeetaalaya; IPAC Wesley Chapel, 8657 Old Pasco Road, Wesley Chapel; 4:30 to 7:30 p.m.; for tickets/info, call (813) 758-4916.

EVENTS

SIGNIFICANT DATES

FEB. 15: MAHA SHIVRATRI

FEB. 17: RAMADAN BEGINS

FEB. 28: FUNDRAISER 2026: MINDS MATTER; organized by Pehchaan Tampa Bay, helping provide hope, resources and assistance to the South Asian diaspora; HCC Auditorium, Brandon, 10451 Nancy Watkins Drive, Tampa; 6 p.m.; \$50 tickets, \$30 student with dinner included; RSVP (813) 720-7115 or visit www.pehchaan-tampabay.org

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 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 7: HOLI; 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.

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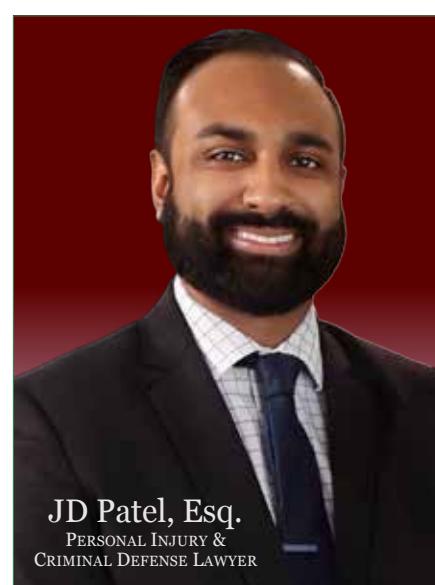
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February 2026 Events

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Wednesday, February 1 (6:30-8:00PM)
Sankashii Chaturthi
Shri Ganesh Hayan
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Thursday, February 12 (8:00PM)
Vijaya Ekadashi
Pooja & Aarti

Saturday, February 14 (6:00-8:00PM)
Pradosh Pooja
Group Shily Pooja

Sunday, February 15 (6:00 PM - 5:00AM)
Maha Shivratri
4 Prahar Pooja (All Night)
Shiv Pooja
For sponsorship of all parts,
please contact the Temple Manager or Temple Priests.

Monday, February 16 (6:00-8:00PM)
Group Rudra Yagna
Minimum 5 Sponsors

Friday, February 27 (8:00PM)
Amala Ekadashi
Pooja & Aarti

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• HANUMAN CHALISA

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• SUNDERKAND PATH
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METABOLIC SYNDROME

By DR. VENKIT IYER, MD, FACS



Years ago, we physicians had never heard about this syndrome. We knew about disorders such as diabetes mellitus, heart disease, hypertension, liver disease, kidney disease, stroke and obesity. We were taught that the different diseases affected older people. Currently, the organ-specific thinking has given way to systemic thinking about the health of the patient.

The term metabolic syndrome was coined about 25 years ago by the World Health Organization after recognizing that the abnormalities had a commonality resulting from mitochondrial dysfunction and insulin resistance. It was noted

that this commonality manifested as high blood pressure/blood sugar levels/ LDL cholesterol, low HDL cholesterol and high triglycerides along with high body mass index (BMI). If a person is found to have at least three of the above parameters, then the person is considered to have metabolic syndrome. This condition is a growing concern globally due to changing lifestyles and dietary habits.

Diagnosis of metabolic syndrome is made by the following measurements:

- Central obesity: Excess fat around the abdominal area, often measured by waist circumference – more than 40 inches for men and 35 inches for women
- Elevated blood pressure: Blood pressure readings consistently above 130/85 mmHg.
- High fasting blood sugar: Fasting glucose levels above 100 mg/dL or HbA1C above 6.0
- High triglycerides: Levels above 150 mg/dL.
- Low HDL cholesterol: Less than 40 mg/dL in men and 50 mg/dL in women.
- High LDL cholesterol above 100 mg/dL.

Several factors contribute to the development of metabolic syndrome, including:

- Genetic predisposition: Family history of diabetes or cardiovascular disease.
- Unhealthy diet: High intake of processed foods, saturated fats, salt and refined sugars.
- Physical inactivity: Sedentary lifestyle with minimal exercise.
- Age: Risk increases as one grows older, especially after 45 years.
- Ethnicity: Certain populations, including South Asians and African Americans are at higher risk due to genetic and lifestyle factors.

Metabolic syndrome does not present with any specific symptoms until very late when an organ dysfunction occurs. Only visible sign may be increased waist circumference. Routine health check-ups, including blood pressure, as well as blood tests are vital for early detection.

If left unmanaged, metabolic syndrome can lead to serious health issues such as:

- Cardiovascular disease, heart attacks and heart failure
- Stroke
- Type 2 diabetes mellitus

- Non-alcoholic fatty liver disease, cirrhosis of liver
- Chronic kidney disease
- Atherosclerosis resulting in blockage of arteries and thromboembolic episodes.

The underlying basic cause for this problem is believed to be mitochondrial dysfunction. Normal mitochondria inside the cells is responsible for energy management with substrate provided, converting glucose to ATP. When it is overloaded with glucose, it is unable to handle it, forcing some to be converted to fat. Moreover, the excess glucose makes the insulin ineffective, leading to insulin resistance. Further sequence of events and inflammation lead to individual organ damages. Metabolic syndrome can be described as a failure of energy management by the mitochondria, caused by excessive overload of substrate and inability to process it.

Managing metabolic syndrome primarily involves lifestyle modifications:

- Dietary changes: Adopting a balanced diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains and lean proteins. Limiting salt, sugar and saturated fat intake is crucial. Ultra processed foods are to be minimized.
- Regular physical activity: Engaging in at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise, such as brisk walking, five days a week.
- Weight management: Achieving and maintaining a healthy body weight.
- Smoking cessation and alcohol moderation: Avoiding tobacco products and limiting alcohol consumption.
- Medication: In some cases, doctors may prescribe medicines to control blood pressure, cholesterol or blood sugar levels. Medications such as Metformin are used to control diabetes mellitus. Effective drugs are also available to control high blood pressure and high cholesterol levels. New class of drugs called as Semaglutides or GLP-1 (Ozempic, Wegovy, Zepbound, Mounjaro) are useful in reducing body weight and diabetes at same time. They work at the mitochondrial level increasing their number and efficiency, in addition to hormonal effects. Choice of medication will be decided by your physician.

With urbanisation and changing dietary preferences, the prevalence of metabolic syndrome is on the rise. Public health initiatives aimed at promoting healthier lifestyles and regular screening are essential to address the growing challenge.

Metabolic syndrome is a serious health condition with long-term consequences if not addressed on time. Early detection, lifestyle changes and appropriate medical intervention can significantly reduce the risk of complications. Regular health check-ups and awareness about beneficial living are key to prevention and management.

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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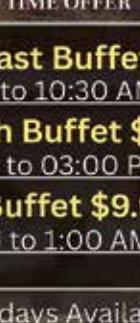
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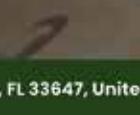




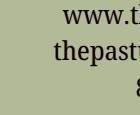




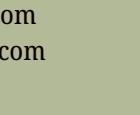




















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GOOD NEWS FOR RELIGIOUS WORKER IMMIGRATION - PART I

By KHUSHBU PATEL and DILIP PATEL



One major problem faced by religious institutions and religious workers is the fact that Green Card processing times have increased significantly beyond the maximum five years a religious worker is allowed to remain in the United States in R-1 status before the worker has to return home for at least one year before starting the R-1 cycle again.

However, there's good news. On Jan. 14, 2026, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) announced an important change that stands to significantly impact religious organizations and their communities across the United States. The DHS has issued an interim final rule that eliminates the previously mandated one-year foreign residency requirement for thousands of religious workers — priests, nuns, rabbis and other clergy — who have historically faced prolonged wait times before returning to serve in the U.S. The move is a notable development in immigration policy, blending legal, religious and administrative considerations.

Background: The Historical Context

For years, religious organizations — comprising priests, nuns, rabbis and other spiritual workers — faced an arduous process to serve their communities in the United States after their initial visa periods. The existing rules mandated that religious workers who had reached the maximum statutory stay in the country (five years under R-1 religious worker visas) had to remain outside the United States for at least one year before they could return. This residency requirement aimed to prevent abuse of the visa system and ensure that religious workers maintained their ties abroad.

However, this requirement has long been a source of frustration for religious organizations, especially given the increasing demand for visas in the EB-4 category, which provides a pathway to permanent residence for religious workers. The demand has exceeded supply, leading to extended wait times and, in many cases, exhaustion of the maximum period for R-1 status. Further, this requirement resulted in prolonged absences, disrupting services, and creating hardships for religious communities that rely on consistent spiritual leadership.

The new rule, effective immediately, removes this one-year foreign residency prerequisite. Now, religious workers can return to serve in the United States without the mandatory hiatus, streamlining the process and reducing delays significantly.

The New Rule: What's Changing?

The Department of Homeland Security's interim final rule, effective immediately upon publication, removes the one-year foreign residency requirement. Specifically:

- **Elimination of the Residency Requirement:** Religious workers who have reached their five-year maximum stay can now seek readmission to the United States without the prior obligation to reside outside the country for a minimum period.
- **Continuity of Service:** This change allows clergy and religious workers to return to their roles more swiftly, minimizing disruptions for faith-based communities that rely on their leadership. **To be continued...**

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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FEBRUARY 2026

TOYOTA OVERHAULS 2026 RAV4 WITH ALL-HYBRID POWERTRAINS!

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

The best-selling small SUV in the United States just received a major overhaul. For 2026, all the Toyota RAVs will be hybrid or plug-in hybrid as the Japanese carmaker moves toward partial electrification of its vehicles. Thirty years on with over 6.4 million units sold and stronger than ever, the RAV4 family included an off-road Woodland edition into its fold couple years ago.

The beginning of the new year signals the end of the sole gas engine, replaced by a 2.5-liter naturally aspirated Atkinson inline-4-cylinder hybrid powertrain cranking out 236 horsepower and 172 pounds-feet of torque. It is coupled to two front and one rear electric motor. A 288-volt lithium-ion battery is recharged by energy captured as the driver applies the brakes or coasts. The SUV is mated to an electronically controlled continuous variable transmission that touts a regenerative braking system. The re-tuned independent MacPherson strut front and multilink rear suspension with stabilizer bars absorbs the bumps of rough surfaces with skill and sure-footedness. And the rack-mounted electric power steering is razor-sharp with a solid on-center feel.

Apart from eco – an efficient mode where the driver can control the throttle opening – and sport for feisty driving, the RAV4 uses EV, i.e. electric at lower speeds of up to 25 mph. The adventure-ready and rugged ride may weigh nearly 3,900 pounds but still can tow up to a remarkable 3,500 pounds.

Up front, a split satin-black hammerhead grille surrounds projector-beam LED headlights as the Woodland badge is distinctly visible up on the crossbars of the roof rails and the rear liftgate. The aggressive look of the robust SUV is further boosted by RIGID Industries' LED fog lamps. Step into the cabin and red orange accents on the stitching, center console lid and steering wheel grab your attention. All new is a 12.3-inch digital cluster as well as an improved 10.5-inch



RAV4 AWD (WOODLAND)

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Looking to venture into uncharted territory and test fresh dirt trails? Then the rugged capabilities of the Woodland trim swiftly and efficiently get to work. With a substantial new chassis, generous cargo capacity and price, the fuel-sipping RAV4 certainly deserves attention. Plenty of it if you are a beginner family or a first-time owner in search of a reliable, durable compact SUV.

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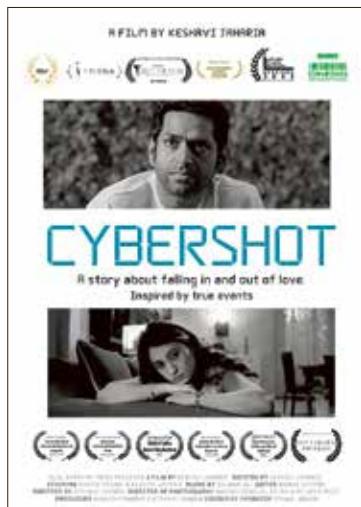
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SOUTH ASIAN INDIAN FILM FESTIVAL OF FLORIDA (SAIFFF)

Story provided by SAIFFF

The South Asian Indian Film Festival Florida (SAIFFF) is returning to Tampa this February, bringing an exciting and diverse lineup of films and cultural experiences to the community. The third edition will take place Feb. 20-22 at NCG Cinemas (7999 Citrus Park Town Center Mall).

SAIFFF will screen 50+ films, including short films, documentaries and feature-length films, created by Indian and South Asian filmmakers from across the globe. Selected films represent countries such as India, Canada, Mexico, Germany, the Netherlands, Australia, the United Kingdom, Bangladesh and Pakistan, showcasing powerful stories rooted in South Asian perspectives while reflecting global experiences.

The festival will kick off with the opening night red carpet premiere and reception on Friday, Feb. 20, at NCG Cinemas. Screenings will continue Saturday and Sunday, culminating in the awards ceremony on Sunday, Feb. 22. SAIFFF will offer a variety of activities, including meditation sessions, a Bollywood workout, and Bollywood dance parties on both Friday and Saturday nights.

Festival Director Hemant Dinkar shared that SAIFFF 2026 received a record number of submissions, with more than 50 films selected by a panel of judges. "The growth of SAIFFF reflects the incredible talent and storytelling emerging from South Asian creators

RETURNS TO TAMPA FEB. 20-22

worldwide. We are proud to bring these voices to Tampa," Dinkar said.

Prominent Bollywood celebrities Omi Vaidya, Riya Sen and Aryan Vaid are expected to attend, along with 12-14 filmmakers from around the world.

The closing night film will be the U.S. premiere of "Hindi Vindi," starring Neena Gupta and directed by Sydney-based filmmaker Ali Sayed. The Australian-Indian feature film follows Kabir, a Sydney teenager of Indian descent who struggles with cultural identity and language.

SAIFFF 2026 is supported by Khaas Baat, NCG Cinema, Groundgame Health, Sakar Trust, The Neuropsychiatry & TMS Group (TNP), and Convergent Media, all united in promoting diversity, culture, and creative expression.

For more information, film schedules and ticket purchases, visit www.SAIFFF.org or contact Hemant Dinkar at (312) 933-2251.

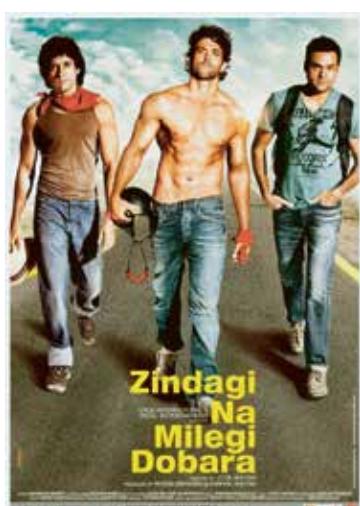
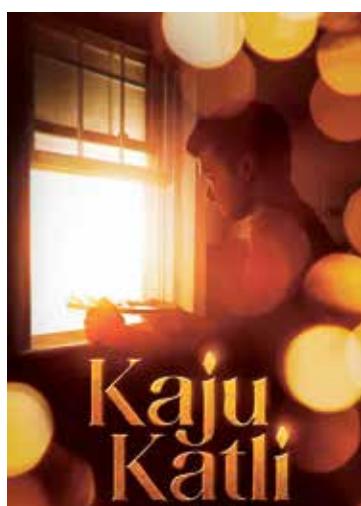
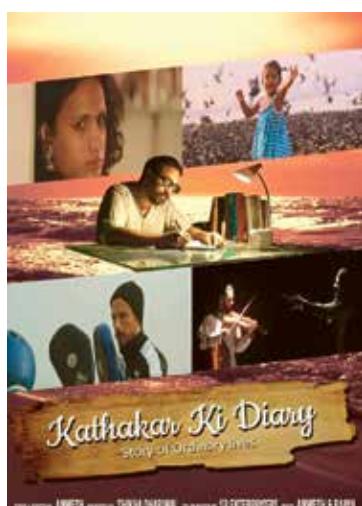
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Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/saiff_florida/
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/saiffFlorida>

A FEW HIGHLIGHTS FROM THIS YEAR'S SHORT FILMS AND DOCUMENTARIES INCLUDE:

- "Kaju Katli" – A grieving Marathi-American teen navigates loss, identity and healing through cooking during Diwali.
- "Ismail" – After failing school twice, a young man redefines success by forging his own unconventional path.
- "Pestilence" – A haunting coming-of-age story where a young boy's innocence erodes after a terrifying task.
- "My Comrade" – A wounded rebel finds refuge in a tribal villager's home, where politics and forbidden love collide.
- "JAAR" – Set in 19th-century Nepal, former lovers flee oppressive caste laws in pursuit of freedom and love.
- "Almari Ka Achaar" – A tender portrayal of quiet love and resilience between two middle-aged men.

"With support from the Consulate General of India, Atlanta, SAIFFF will be screening Sridevi's "English Vinglish" and Hrithik Roshan's "Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara."





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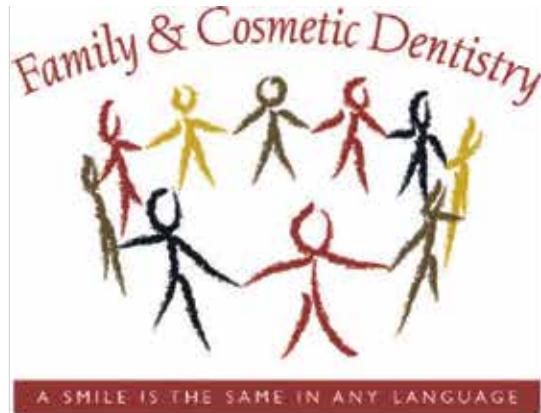
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ASTROLOGY

FEBRUARY 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) February brings sustained momentum with a need for refinement. Efforts initiated earlier now demand patience and strategic execution. Professional matters show progress through disciplined follow-through rather than haste. Financial plans should be based on realistic assessment. Well-thought-out relationships benefit when emotion is balanced with realistic situations. The month supports steady action, vitality as well as emotional maturity.

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) February brings emotional balance with inner security. Professional responsibilities may increase; consistency and commitment ensure recognition. Cautious investment and long-term planning may be required in financial matters. Relationships deepen through loyalty, commitment and reassurance. Health matters show improvement through staying on regular nourishment course. The month supports strengthening foundations and being emotionally stable.

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)

The month enhances communication and problem-solving skills. Professional opportunities may arise through proper dialogue or networking. Revisit earlier plans, fine-tune them according to time and opportunities the situations might present for better execution. Financial decisions only benefit when analyzed practically. Emotional clarity grows when situations are analyzed in true perspective. The month focusses on being adaptable and applying practical ideas in life.

CANCER / Kataka (Watery sign, ruling planet is Moon) - (June 22-July 22) Moon Sign - Stars covered Punarvasu (4th part), Pushya, Aslesha

February focuses on sharing greater responsibility and emotional grounding. On work front, things may need extra care with a steady effort, which may bring appreciation and recognition. Family matters require compassion and calm communication. Financial stability may improve through proper budgeting and planning. One may feel inner peace, which grows through reflection, prayer and creative expression. The month supports nurturing others while protecting personal boundaries.

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 highlights being consistent and persistent to becoming a good leader. Recognition follows those who try with sincere and purposeful efforts and ethical conduct. Creative talents receive appreciation, especially in group settings. Financial gains may come through professional handling of situations. Relationships flourish through generosity and warmth. This month supports sustenance, confidence 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)

February favors organization and skills refinement. Professional progress comes through attention to detail and methodical work. Financial matters stabilize with careful monitoring. Health improves by maintaining balanced and disciplined routines. Emotionally, flexibility brings harmony. The month supports steady improvement and practical wisdom.

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 cordial and harmonious actions whether family or in professional environment. Career-focused partnerships and teamwork may bring positive outcomes. Financial planning requires weighing options patiently. Relationships grow through diplomacy and mutual respect. Artistic or spiritual pursuits bring inner satisfaction. The month supports being balanced as well as emotional for inner satisfaction.

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FEBRUARY 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 February brings greater determination and being more strategic in thinking. Professional advancement is possible through focused effort and being persistent. Financial growth follows those who have a well-planned map. Emotional connections are built based on trust and openness, which should be at their core. The month means slow transformation through patience and self-control.

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 focuses on learning and being self-driven. Professional growth is supported through moving in the right direction, determination and expansion of knowledge. Financial prospects improve with proper planning and setting realistic expectations. Relationships form having shared ideals and through honesty. The month encourages one to be more optimistic and guided by practical vision.

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) February strengthens commitment and perseverance. Professional efforts show tangible results through structured work. Financial stability improves with disciplined savings. Relationships need warmth alongside shared responsibility. The month supports long-term planning and steady progress.

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) February highlights innovation and responsibility. Professional ideas gain acceptance generally when applied practically. Financial matters benefit from periodic review. Emotional connections deepen through sincerity and shared goals. The month supports aligning ideals with real-world 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 is helpful with increased intuition and having emotional clarity. Professional matters progress through creative insight and compassionate

leadership. Financial matters bring relief, peace and stability. Relationships grow through proper understanding and spiritual bonding. The month supports inner growth, healing and gentle forward movement.

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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FLORIDA NEWS

MINDS MATTER: PEHCHAAN FUNDRAISER SET FEB. 28 IN TAMPA

Story provided by Pehchaan

Entering our 20th year, we at Pehchaan feel immensely grateful to have this wonderful community on our side. Through challenges and rough paths, we have managed to grow and thrive.

On Feb. 28, we are having our 20th anniversary fundraiser and we would love to have you by our side and spread our message: everyone should know that they are not alone and that Pehchaan and our community is here to help and assist in whichever way possible.

Mental well-being wasn't always a part of our everyday conversations. South Asians often avoid or ignore the challenges we all face, like alienation in a foreign land or the cultural conflicts of bringing up second-generation children. Many have tried to pretend that these issues were unimportant, or bore the burden in silence, because reaching out for help was considered a sign of weakness.

But things are gradually shifting. We are starting to talk about mental health without shame or fear. Parents are taking their children to therapy, and couples are going for counseling. Survivors of domestic violence are recovering, rebuilding. We'd like to think that Pehchaan has helped this change come about, through our various workshops, awareness seminars, and support sessions over the past 20 years. We have worked hard to support our community's mental health.

Please join us and support our community. The fundraiser will be from 6 p.m. at HCC Auditorium, Brandon, 10451 Nancy Watkins Drive, Tampa. Tickets are \$50 and \$30 student with dinner included. RSVP (813) 720-7115 or visit www.pehchaan-tampabay.org. Details are in the ad below.

EVENTS

Cont'd from page 2

ORLANDO/CASSELBERRY/WINTER PARK

FEB. 7: KEERTHANA – INDIAN AMERICAN YOUTH ORCHESTRA; musical gala presented by Hindu Society of Central Florida; HSCF temple hall, 1994 E. Lake Drive, Casselberry; 4 p.m.; free; donations welcome; for information, call Muthusamy Swami at (407) 902-8910.

FEB. 7: INDIA DAY; Kia Center, 400 W. Church St., Orlando; 5 to 7 p.m.; pre-game festivities at Fan Fest, Indian food, on-court performances, followed by Orlando Magic vs. Utah Jazz; for information, visit www.iaccorlando.com or email info@iaccorlando.com

FEB. 19: 3rd ANNUAL SIP & SOCIALIZE; educational networking event by Indian American Business Association and Climate First Bank, 1150 S. Orlando Ave., Winter Park; 6 to 9 p.m.; free for IABA members, \$40 non-members; for information and to RSVP, visit <https://www.iabausa.com/wine26>

FORT MYERS/NAPLES

FEB. 7: INTERGENERATIONAL PAINTING EVENT; organized by India Association of Fort Myers; Vino's Picasso, 15250 S. Tamiami Trail, Fort Myers; 3 to 6 p.m.; \$20 children, \$42 adults; for information, visit <https://www.iaftmyers.org/>

SOUTH FLORIDA (POMPANO BEACH)

FEB. 7: NAMASTE! presented by Standard Land Development; Grand Indian art and food festival; Pompano Beach Amphitheatre & Grounds, 1806 N.E. Sixth St., Pompano Beach; 11:30 a.m. to 8 p.m.; free entry/parking; 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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CAN YOU CLAIM A TAX DEDUCTION FOR TIPS OR OVERTIME INCOME?

By TEJAL DHRUVE, CPA

If you received tips or overtime pay in 2025, you may be eligible for a new deduction when you file your income tax return. Both deductions can be claimed whether or not you itemize deductions. But various rules and limits apply. Also be aware that such income may still be fully taxable for state and local income tax purposes. And federal payroll taxes still apply to tips and overtime income you deduct for federal income tax purposes.



Deducting Tips

Eligible taxpayers can deduct up to \$25,000 of annual qualified tips income. The deduction begins to phase out when modified adjusted gross income (MAGI) exceeds \$150,000 (\$300,000 for married couples filing jointly). It's completely phased out when MAGI reaches \$400,000 (\$550,000 for joint filers).

Qualified tips can be paid by customers in cash or with credit cards or given to workers through tip-sharing arrangements. The tips deduction is available if you receive qualified tips in an occupation that's designated by the IRS as one where tips are customary. Some examples of eligible occupation categories are beverage and food service, hospitality and guest services, personal appearance and wellness, and transportation and delivery.

The tips deduction is allowed for both employees and self-employed individuals. However, those who work in certain trades or businesses (such as health, law, accounting, financial services, investment management) are ineligible.

Deducting Overtime

Eligible taxpayers can deduct up to \$12,500 of qualified overtime income (\$25,000 for joint filers). The deduction begins to phase out when MAGI exceeds \$150,000 (\$300,000 for joint filers). It's completely phased out when MAGI reaches \$275,000 (\$550,000 for joint filers).

Qualified overtime income is overtime compensation mandated under Section 7 of the Fair Labor Standards Act. It requires time-and-a-half overtime pay except for certain exempt workers. Only the extra “half” constitutes qualified overtime income and thus is deductible.

Qualified overtime income doesn't include overtime premiums that aren't required by Sec. 7, such as those required under state laws or pursuant to union-negotiated collective bargaining agreements.

Reporting Requirements

Under the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, qualified tips income must be reported on Form W-2, Form 1099-NEC or another specified information return or statement furnished to both the worker and the IRS. And qualified overtime income must be reported to workers on Form W-2 or another specified information return or statement furnished to both the worker and the IRS.

However, the IRS announced that for the 2025 tax year, there will be no OBBBA-related changes to federal information returns such as Form W-2, Forms 1099 and Form 941. The IRS is providing transition relief for the 2025 tax year and will update forms for the 2026 tax year.

Contact the office for help determining your eligibility for one or both of these deductions.

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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MELBOURNE MARCH 7-8; GAINESVILLE MARCH 7; FORT MYERS MARCH 14

By NITISH S. RELE – editor@khaasbaat.com

MELBOURNE: Manav Mandir will present its 29th annual Indiafest on Saturday, March 7, and Sunday, March 8, at Wickham Park, 2500 Parkway Drive, Melbourne. The fun family event brings Indian culture to the Space Coast with cultural and fashion shows, henna, arts and crafts, Indian cooking demo, food, raffle drawings, etc. This year's theme is "Dynamic Women of India," which honors the contribution of Indian women, coinciding with International Women's Day. Timings are 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Saturday and 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday. Admission is \$8 for adults, \$4 for children 12 and under; kids younger than 5 years are free.

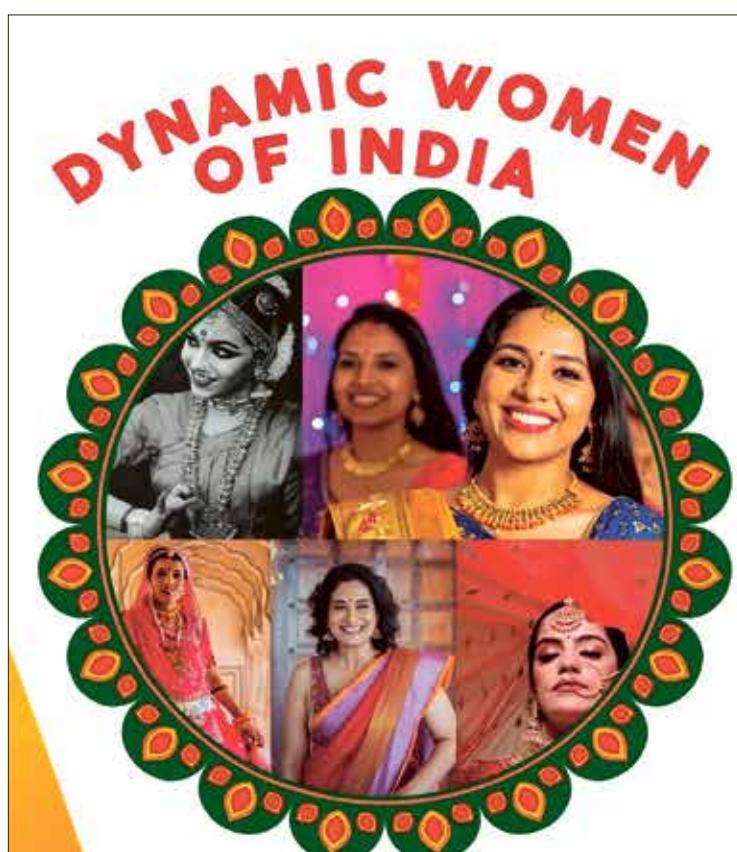
This festival is unique in its commitment to giving back to the community. Indiafest is a non-profit, cultural organization known for its charitable efforts to local charities, including the parent organization, Manav Mandir. With community support, the organization has raised and donated over \$1.4 million to date. Last year's selection were Aging Matters of Brevard, which serves meals to the senior population and, Children Hunger Project, which provides food to elementary school kids for the weekend who would otherwise go hungry. This

year's selection is WAYS for Life, a nonprofit offering wraparound youth services to at-risk young adults, including those transitioning out of foster care and experiencing homelessness. For information, call Nina Gadodia at (321) 779-0110, e-mail info@indiafestbrevard.org or visit www.indiafestbrevard.org

GAINESVILLE/ALACHUA: Presented by the India Cultural & Education Center, India Fest (Traditions of India) will be held on Saturday, March 7. It will be held from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. at Legacy Park Multipurpose Center, 15400 Peggy Road, Alachua. There also will be Indian food, music/dance, fashion, jewelry, etc. For information, email indiafest@icec-florida.org or visit www.icec-florida.org

FORT MYERS: The India Association of Fort Myers (IAFM) will hold its annual 35th India Fest on Saturday, March 14, at Alliance for the Arts, 10091 McGregor Blvd., Fort Myers. The noon to 8 p.m. event will feature Indian food, dance, henna, music, handicrafts and clothing. More specifically, there will be live entertainment throughout the day, including modern and classical dances, and fashion shows.

For information, email indiafest@iafortmyers.org or visit <https://www.iafortmyers.org/>



Cultural Shows, Indian Cuisine, Fashion Show, Music, Henna, Cooking Demo, Arts & Crafts, Great Raffle Prizes, Yoga & More!

* No Pets Allowed Except Service Animals

MANAV MANDIR 
Presents

Indiafest

SATURDAY, MARCH 7: 10:00AM – 6:00PM
SUNDAY, MARCH 8: 11:00AM – 5:00PM

Wickham Park
2500 Parkway Dr. Melbourne, FL

Advance tickets can be purchased at
IndiafestBrevard.org

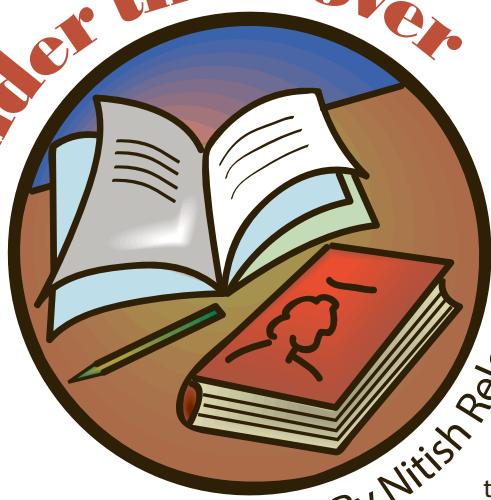
Adults: \$8.00
 Children under 12: \$4.00
 Children under 5: Free



Indiafest proudly supports



Under the Cover



By Nitish Rele

“Ten Incarnations of Rebellion” by Vaishnavi Patel; 300 pages; \$29 (published by Ballantine Books; www.randomhousebooks.com)

What if the British had never left India in 1947 and stayed on to rule well into the 1960s by violently cracking down on freedom movements and protests? It is this alternate history that Vaishnavi Patel tackles in 10 chapters/incarnations of Vishnu with sheer brilliance and clever tact. Essentially, each chapter of this well-structured book, beginning with a moral and concluding with a tale, represents a year in the protagonist’s life. In the first chapter, “Matsya, Fish,” Patel writes, “I learned how to hope at nineteen. It started with a song. I did not, could not, know what was to come—the blood that would stain the streets, the fire that would fill the skies, the scars that would carve our souls—but even if I had, still I would have chosen it. Still I would have set myself on the path of rebellion.” And in the final chapter, “Kalki, Restorer,” she reveals. “I learned how to believe at twenty-eight.” Set amid the backdrop of a Bombay that has been burned down, rebuilt and renamed Kingston, the story highlights the struggle for Independence by the young central character Kalki Divekar (daughter of a revolutionary), her Dalit friend Yashu and Fauzia. Since women were looked down upon and unlikely to participate in any insurrection, the trio obtain jobs in the British government. Despite religious strife and caste/internal divisions, the freedom fighters aren’t swayed in their fight to save Kingston. The city is in disarray with rebels being hunted down and young men drafted to wars, never to return home. Acts of sabotage bring them on the cusp of near death. At the same time, they find a few surprising allies. That the British Empire was a scheme of violence and terror is historically true, notes Patel in her Author’s Note. The book looks to examine the sacrifices and strength necessary to achieve independence, “the selfishness and selflessness that go hand in hand in revolution, and the necessity of building coalitions across differences and dismantling indigenous forms of oppression ... ‘Ten Incarnations of Rebellion’ is a love letter to those who fought and an exhortation to keep fighting. The struggle is never over.” Indian and British history buffs will appreciate the bibliography at the end. Author of the thought-provoking “Kaikeyi” and “Goddess of the River,” Patel has penned a gem of a ‘rebellious’ novel that should serve to inspire freedom fighters around the world to persevere despite all odds.

2026 ANNUAL INDIA FEST PRESENTS

royal INDIA

March 14th 2026
Alliance for the Arts
10091 McGregor Blvd, Fort Myers, FL 33919
12pm- 8 pm
www.iaftmyers.org

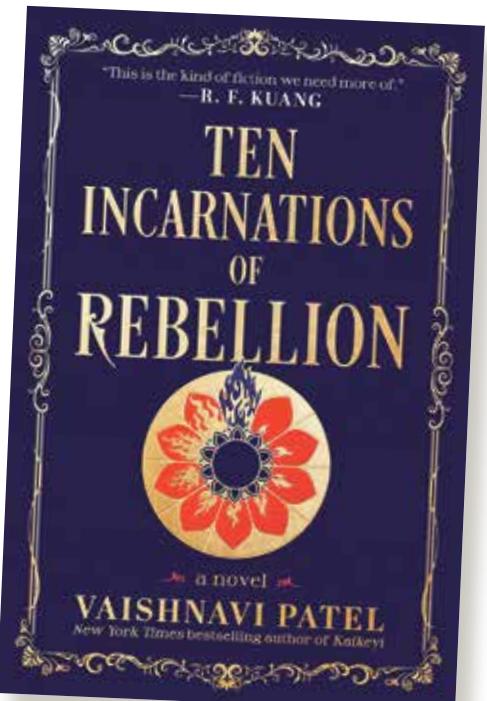
Majestic Fashion Show
Royal Photo Booth
Jewelry & Fine Goods
Henna Beauty Bar

Tickets

Tickets: Scan The QR Code!

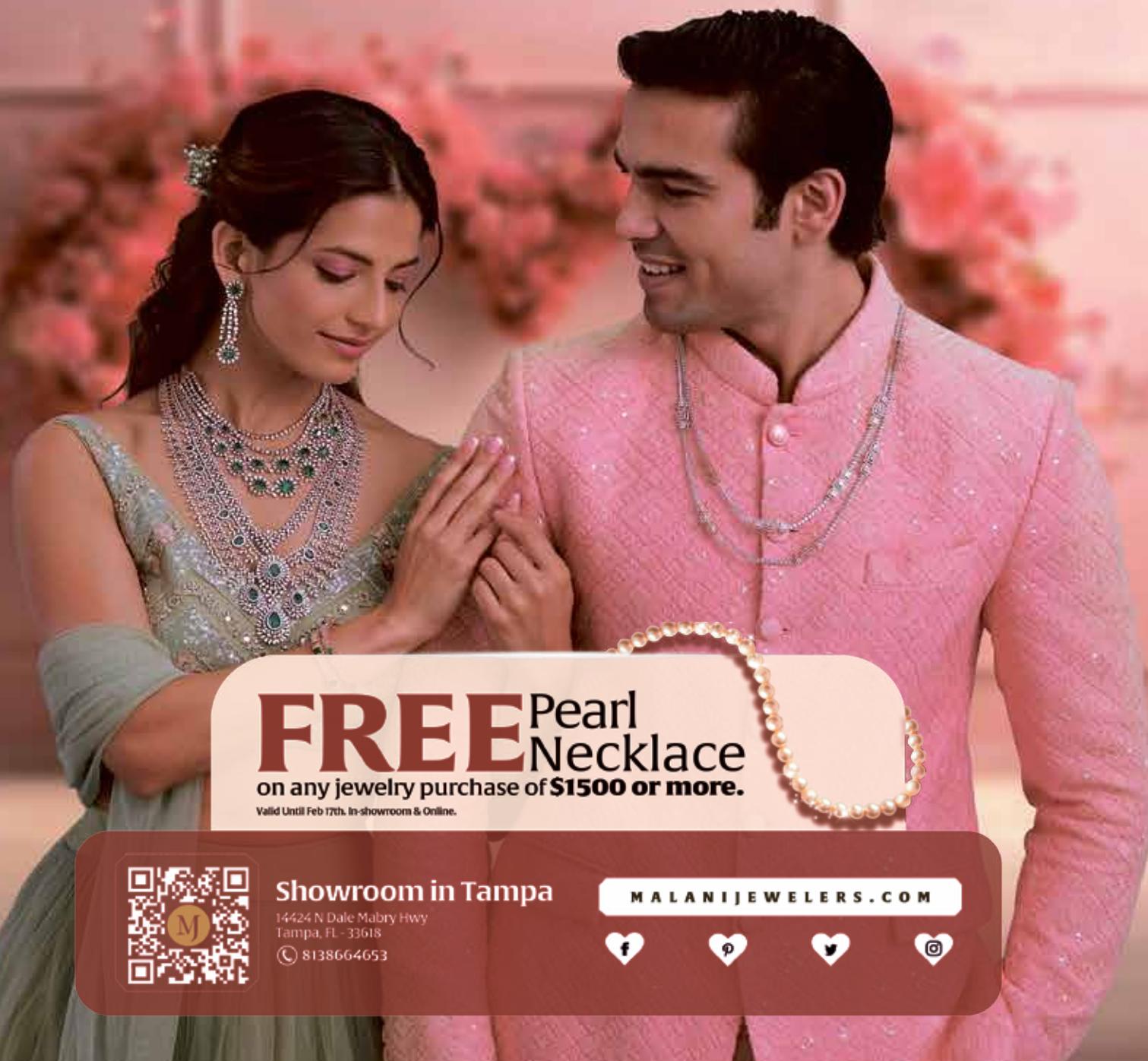
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