

KHAASBAAT

A PUBLICATION FOR INDIAN AMERICANS IN FLORIDA

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MARCH 2024

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HAPPY HOLI

FESTIVAL OF COLORS

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

- TAMPA/PINELLAS PARK/SEFFNER**
MARCH 31: organized by Gujarati Samaj of Tampa Bay; 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.; Jennings Middle School, 9325 Governors Run Drive, Seffner; free for GSTB members, \$25 for non-members; for information, call Mahesh Modha at (813) 476-1540.
- ORLANDO/CASSELBERRY**
MARCH 24: Hindu Society of Central Florida, 1994 Lake Drive, Casselberry; 6:30 p.m. pooja with Holika Dahan at 7:15 p.m.; for information, call (407) 699-5277 or visit www.orlandohindutemple.org
- SOUTH FLORIDA (MIRAMAR)**
MARCH 17: 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.

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ULTRA-LUXURY AT ITS PEAK!

Story, page 18

WHO'S WHO

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

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EVENTS / SIGNIFICANT DATES

EVENTS

FOR HOLI EVENTS, SEE PAGES 1 & 8

TAMPA/ST. PETERSBURG/CLEARWATER

MARCH 6: GSTB SENIOR DAY; organized by Gujarati Samaj of Tampa Bay; India Cultural Center, 5509 Lynn Road, Tampa; 10.30 a.m. to 2.30 p.m.; \$10; lunch and entertainment; for information, call Mahesh Modha at (813) 476-1540.

MARCH 8: CELEBRATE MAHASHIVRATRI WITH SADHGURU; organized by Isha Yoga; local celebration will be at India Cultural Center, 5511 Lynn Road, Tampa; 6 p.m. to 6 a.m.; for information, call (813) 413-1661; Pancha Bhuta Kriya with Sadhguru online will be on March 7 at 10 p.m.; \$25; visit www.isha.us/5

MARCH 12: 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 16: MACF COMMITTEE 2024 INAUGURATION/CULTURAL PROGRAMS; presented by Malayalee Association of Central Florida; 6 p.m.; Knanaya Community Center, 2620 Washington Road, Valrico; \$20 per person or \$50 VIP with food; for information, call (201) 665-3737.

MARCH 20: ICC SENIORS GET-TOGETHER; no get-together this month since ICC seniors are on a cruise, which is sold out; 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.

MARCH 31: GRAND CARNATIC VOCAL CONCERT; presented by Swaralaya of Tampa; performers are Vidhwan Bharat Sundar and group; 4 p.m.; Hindu Temple of Florida Cultural Hall, 5511 Lynn Road, Tampa; for more information, email swaralayaoftampa@gmail.com

SIGNIFICANT DATES

MARCH 8: MAHASHIVRATRI

MARCH 24: HOLI

APRIL 4: SPIRITUAL DISCOURSE WITH APTAPUTRA; Hindu Temple of Florida, 5509 Lynn Road, Tampa; 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. followed by dinner; organized by Tampa Dada Bhagwan Parivar; for information, call 1-877-505-3232, Ext. 1015.

APRIL 27: 25TH ANNIVERSARY GALA; Academy of Odissi Dance; Sacred Heart Knanaya, Catholic Community Center, 2620 Washington Road, Valrico; 6 p.m.; for tickets, call Gopa Rautray at (813) 992-5234.

ORLANDO/CASSELBERRY

MARCH 3: PICNIC; organized by Gujarati Society of Central Florida; 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Bill Frederick Park-Turkey Lake, 3401 S. Hiawassee Road, Orlando; free for members, \$15 non-members; \$2 parking fee; for information, call (352) 250-4287.

MARCH 10: 9TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS; HSCF New Age Group; noon; Gateway to India, 790 E. State Road 434, Casselberry; appetizers, veg, non-veg food, soft drinks; \$12 per person for New Age Group members; for information, email hsconfnewagegroup@gmail.com

MARCH 11: 1ST ANNUAL GOLF TOURNAMENT; organized by Gujarati Society of Central Florida; Heathrow Country Club, 1200 Bridgewater Drive, Lake Mary; \$25 registration fee (members only); RSVP at MySamaj app or gujaratisocietycfl.com; 8 a.m. to 9 a.m. breakfast, tee-off at 9:30 a.m.; for information, call Jayesh Patel at (407) 460-2020.

Cont'd on page 8



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| SATURDAY, MARCH 02 (5:30 PM to 7:30 PM) • SUNDARKAND PATH SUNDAY, MARCH 03 (5:30 PM) • JHULAY LAAL BHAJANS THURSDAY, MARCH 07 (6:30 PM) • PARDOSH PUJA FRIDAY, MARCH 08 (6:00 PM TO 5:00 AM) • MAHASHIVRATRI VRAT PUJA & BHAJANS SATURDAY, MARCH 09 (4:00 PM to 8:00 PM) • MAHASHIVRATRI VRAT UDYAPAN • MAHAMRITYUNYA RUDRA HAVAN SUNDAY, MARCH 17 (4:00 PM to 6:00 PM) • ANAND NO GARBO SUNDAY, MARCH 24 (4:00 PM to 7:00 PM) • HOLI CELEBRATION SATURDAY, MARCH 30 (5:30 PM to 8:00 PM) • MATA KI CHOWKI | EVERY MONDAY - 6:30 PM • SHIV ABHISHEK AND PUJA EVERY TUESDAY - 7:00 PM • HANUMAN CHALISA AARTI EVERY THURSDAY - 7:00 PM • SAI BABA SATSANG • MAHA PRASAD <p>For more detail, call Pandit Manikya Sharma 813-484-9568 Pandit Rushi Vyas 813-503-3388 Pandit Pranav Bhatt 813-720-1460</p> |

SAVE THE DATE

- > **TUESDAY, APRIL 9** : NAVRATRE CELEBRATION START
- > **SATURDAY, APRIL 13** : MATA KA JAGRAN (To Sponsor the event contact Temple)



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NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN OBESITY MANAGEMENT

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



Weight reduction and obesity management can be frustrating for both patients and doctors. Fortunately, there seems to be some silver lining on the horizon recently, giving hope to many.

According to Center for Disease control (CDC), four out of 10 Americans are overweight. Obesity is more of a problem in the Western countries, whereas malnutrition is an issue in many poor countries.

People can verify their obesity level by measuring body mass index (BMI). Nowadays, the cellphone can be used for easy calculation of BMI by entering the height and weight.

BMI above 25 is considered as overweight and above 30 is considered as obese. Those with BMI above 30 must undergo treatment to reduce body weight.

The underlying reason for obesity is unclear. Often, it starts from childhood. It could have a genetic etiology such as Leptin deficiency, which is a genetic mutation that results in uncontrollable appetite. It could be due to an addictive behavior promoted by the brain seeking comfort from stressful issues in life. A baby stops crying when it is fed, irrespective of the initial causative factor. Ghrelin is a hunger hormone that makes us eat more, whenever food intake is restricted. The type of food we eat and quantity, the calories we consume, the frequency of eating, snacking between meals, use of ultra-processed food and cola drinks, and consumption of trans fat are factors to consider. Sedentary lifestyle with inadequate physical activity worsens the scenario.

Obesity carries higher risk for the individual to develop variety of medical problems such as diabetes mellitus, respiratory insufficiency, cardiac insufficiency, arthritis, joint and venous problems, leg and decubitus ulcers, thrombophlebitis, sleep disorders, hygienic issues, mental depression, suicidal tendency and alcohol addiction. It decreases longevity by about 20 years. Metabolic syndrome occurs when the muscle mass decreases and abdominal fat increases. In addition, it leads to various socio-economic and logistic problems in getting medical tests and treatments.

Initial treatment of obesity is through medical management, which includes dietary control, exercise, medications and psychosocial support. Many different diets are offered in the commercial world that promises to decrease the weight in a short time. One must eat healthy food and reduce intake of calories. Health spas promote various exercises and weight reduction strategies.

Those who are unable to lose weight with these measures are often recommended

for surgical procedures, generally called bariatric. Several variations of the type of surgical procedures have enjoyed popularity from time to time. Gastric and intestinal bypass procedures were used previously. Currently, removal of a vertical length of the stomach called sleeve gastrectomy is the procedure of choice. This can be done via open surgery, laparoscopic method or robotic assistance. Endoscopic non-surgical stomach volume reduction techniques are also being tried.

A new development has been introduction of a class of drugs called semaglutide, otherwise known as glucagon-like-peptide 1 receptor agonists (GLP-1). The brand names are Ozempic and Wegovy manufactured by Novo Nordisk and Mounjaro by Eli Lilly respectively. They were found to be effective in managing Type 2 diabetes mellitus along with weight loss. Patients showed improvements in cardiovascular and physical functioning. The drugs work by reducing appetite and delaying stomach discharge. Patients lost 15 percent of the body weight shortly after taking these medications.

Public interest in consuming these drugs has become astronomical despite the cost. Insurance companies are not covering the medication yet. The cost of the drug can be up to a \$1,000 a month. It is taken as a weekly injection, but pill form is expected to be available. Patients must continue weight reduction strategies such as exercise and dietary control along with the medications. When the drugs is stopped, they are likely to regain weight.

Side effects include nausea, vomiting, regurgitation and pulmonary aspiration during anesthesia, constipation or diarrhea. More serious complications are pancreatitis, gall stones, bowel obstruction and gastroparesis known as stomach paralysis. Anesthesiologists recommend stopping use one week before elective surgical procedures. Patients can also start the drugs at a smaller dosage and slowly advance the amount over a period. Moreover, the drugs do not work for everybody alike.

Obesity is a disease. It is best to avoid getting it from childhood onward. Of course, it is easier said than done for many who live with it. New excitement in obesity management is the use of semaglutide (GLP-1) drugs. It is not for everyone. Please consult with your primary care physician or a qualified bariatric specialist to discuss options.

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

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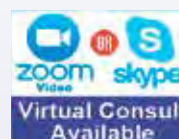
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USCIS PUBLISHED EXPECTED FINAL RULE TO INCREASE CERTAIN IMMIGRATION VISA FEES, FOR 1ST TIME SINCE 2016

By DILIP PATEL, YOVA BOROVSKA & KAITLYN DHAR



I am pleased to present this update, which has been co-authored by my law partner Yova Borovska and associate attorney Kaitlyn Dhar. They are highly experienced immigration lawyers and Yova is also Florida Bar Board Certified in immigration law.

The Department of State released the final rule on USCIS fee increases. The fee increases will go into effect on April 1, 2024. Previously, Form I-129, used for nonimmigrant visas such as H-1B, L-1, TN, and O-1, to name a few, was \$460 for all visa types. This will change to be different

fees for the different visas. For example, the H-1B filing fee will now be \$780 (in time for cap season), the O-1 filing fee will be \$1,055, and the L-1 filing fee will be \$1,385. The final rule includes a \$600 asylum program fee on top of the base fee. The agency noted that the fees will not increase by more than 26 percent, which is equivalent to the increase in the Consumer Price Index since the last fee increase in 2016. We are hoping that the fee hikes will result in investments internally at USCIS to improve case processing timelines, and efficiency with the agency adjudication of petitions and applications.

USCIS Announces Strengthened Integrity Measures for H-1B Program: "Beneficiary Centric" Selection Process for H-1B Registrations

USCIS has also announced that it is changing the H-1B selection process so that each H-1B beneficiary is entered in the random selection process only once, regardless of the number of registrations submitted on the beneficiary's behalf. This is welcomed and celebrated news to avoid those who tried in the past to increase their chances of success in the random selection process by asking multiple employers to submit registrations on their behalf. The rule also clarified that it is still possible for an individual to be registered by two potential employers, but such beneficiary will only be entered in the lottery just once. If such a beneficiary is selected, each employer will be notified of the selection and each employer can file its own petition to employ that individual. This could lead to complications which involve a change of status to H-1B, because the beneficiary can only take up employment with one employer. We would recommend that employers obtain confirmation from each potential beneficiary that they are not seeking registration through other employers.

USCIS Releases FY2023 Progress on Meeting Its Strategic Goals: Completing 10 million cases!

USCIS released its FY2023 data showing that it completed 10 million immigration cases and reduced its backlog for the first time in over a decade. Further, USCIS announced that its data also improved customer experience, addressed humanitarian needs, and strengthened employment-based immigration. We are hoping to see USCIS implement further procedures and measures to improve backlogs in case processing, including utilizing technology for more time

efficiency spent on cases in the agencies long queue.

Reminder! Premium Processing filing fee went into effect on Feb. 26

As of Feb. 26, requests for premium processing must include the new fee of \$2,805. If USCIS receives a Form I-907 postmarked on or after the effective date with the incorrect filing fee, USCIS will reject the Form I-907 and return the filing fee.

March Visa Bulletin: Little to no movement seen for priority dates:

The issuance of immigrant visas ("green cards") is subject to an annual quota set by Congress. There is a per-country limit of 7 percent for available employment-based immigrant visas, for example. The U.S. Department of State (DOS) releases a Visa Bulletin monthly to inform prospective immigrants about the availability of statutorily limited visas. Here are some majority takeaways from what we are seeing in the March Visa Bulletin:

Employment-Based Immigration: USCIS will rely on the Final Action Dates (not Filing Dates) in March for employment-based visa categories.

- The EB-1 final action dates will advance by two weeks for China, to July 15, 2022, and by one month for India, to Oct. 1, 2020.
- The EB-2 final action dates will remain unchanged for China (Jan. 1, 2020) and India (March 1, 2012). The EB-2 final action date will advance by one week for all other countries, to Nov. 22, 2022.
- The EB-3 Professional/skilled worker final action date will remain unchanged for China (Sept. 1, 2020) and India (July 1, 2012). It will advance by one week for all other countries, to Sept. 8, 2022.

Family-Based Immigration: USCIS is accepting cases based on the Dates for Filing for family-based visa categories.

- F1 Unmarried sons and daughters of U.S. citizens will remain unchanged worldwide (Sept. 1, 2017).
- F2A Spouses and children of permanent residents will remain unchanged worldwide (Sept. 1, 2023).
- F2B Unmarried sons and daughters (21 years of age or older) of permanent residents will remain unchanged (Jan. 1, 2017).
- F3 Married sons and daughters of U.S. citizens remains unchanged (March 1, 2010).
- F4 Brothers and sisters of adult U.S. citizens will also remain unchanged worldwide (March 1, 2008), and for India (Feb. 22, 2006).

If you have any specific inquiries or require further details on any of the above immigration subject areas, please feel free to ask!

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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HAPPY HOLI

FESTIVAL OF COLORS

More communities celebrating the festival of colors in Florida:

Cont'd from page 1

TAMPA/PINELLAS PARK/SEFFNER

MARCH 24: organized by Maayboli Melawa Tampa Bay (Marathi association); time, venue and details to be finalized; for information, visit www.mmtbusa.org or email secretary@mmtbusa.org

MARCH 24: Satyanarayan vrat katha and Holi Dahan; **Shree Raam Mandir**, 7411 E. Comanche Ave., Tampa; 7 p.m.; for information, call Angela at (813) 265-3268.

MARCH 24: Satyanarayan katha from 5 to 6 p.m., Holi Ka Dahan from 6 to 8:30 p.m., and mahaprasad after aarti; **Ambaji Mandir**, 10991 58th St., Pinellas Park; call the mandir at (727) 388-6685 or visit www.ambajimandir.com

MARCH 24: Satyanarayan katha from 5 to 6 p.m., Holi Ka Dahan from 6 to 8:30 p.m., and mahaprasad after aarti; **Laxmi Narayan Mandir**, 4615 George Road, Tampa; for information, call (813) 444-9786 or visit www.hindutempletampa.com

LAKELAND/BARTOW

MARCH 24: Shree Swaminarayan Hindu Temple (ISSO), 2793 New Tampa Highway, Lakeland; 4 to 8 p.m.; for information, call (863) 529-1146 or visit www.issolakeland.org

MARCH 24: Picnic and Holi Dahan; organized by Bhartiya Samaj of Central Florida; 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.; Mary Holland Park, 2015 Shumate Drive, Bartow; for information, visit <https://www.bscfl.com>

ORLANDO/CASSELBERRY

MARCH 24: organized by Gujarati Society of Central Florida; 6 p.m.; Shree Laxminarayan Mandir, 5020 W. South St., Orlando; free; for information, email info@gujaratisocietycfl.com or visit www.gujaratisocietycfl.com

MARCH 30: Maa Durga Sri Sai Baba Temple, 11414 S. Apopka Vineland Road, Orlando; Holika Dahan at 7:30 p.m.; free; for information, call (407) 437-6709 or visit www.durgasaitemple.com

MARCH 30: organized by Indian Horizon of Florida; Festival Park, 2911 E. Robinson St., Orlando; 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.; \$10; for information, call (321) 946-6332 or visit www.indianhorizonfl.com to purchase tickets.

JACKSONVILLE

MARCH 23: presented by Hindu Society of North East Florida; 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.; Hindu Temple of Jacksonville, 4968 Greenland Road; for information, visit <https://jaxics.org/>

MARCH 24: organized by Gujarati Samaj of North East Florida; Ramallah American Club, 3130 Parental Home Road, Jacksonville; 11 a.m.; free for members with RSVP, \$20 non-members; for information, call (224) 622-0655 or visit www.gsnef.org

NAPLES/BONITA SPRINGS

MARCH 24: organized by India Association of Naples; Vineyards Community Park, 6231 Arbor Blvd., W. Naples; 2 to 5 p.m.; Holi colors, snacks and drinks will be provided by association; for information, email naplesindia@gmail.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.

FLORIDA NEWS

Cont'd from page 2

EVENTS

MARCH 17: DHYANOTSAV: JOURNEY TO INNER PEACE; organized by Heartfulness Institute; inspirational speakers; 10 a.m. to noon; Hindu Society of Central Florida, 1994 Lake Drive, Casselberry; for information, visit <https://heartfulness.us/orlando> or email orlando@heartfulness.org

MARCH 24: 7th ANNUAL TENNIS TOURNAMENT; presented by Indian American Business Association & Chamber; USTA National Campus, 10000 USTA Blvd., Orlando; 8 a.m.; \$50 player, \$25 student; free for 2024 IABA members; for information, call (407) 278-6688 or visit www.iabausa.com

MARCH 28-31: AYURVEDA, YOGA & CHAKRA HEALING RETREAT; organized by Hindu University of America; Pine Lake Retreat Center, 21725 FL 33, Groveland; to register for the four-day course, visit <https://www.hua.edu/>

MARCH 30: INDIAFEST; organized by Hindu Society of Central Florida, 1994 Lake Drive, Casselberry; noon to 5 p.m.; on temple grounds, cultural program in air-conditioned community hall; free admission; for information, visit www.orlandohindutemple.org

INVERNESS

MARCH 29-31: TEMPLE 18th ANNIVERSARY; three days of celebrations with Homa and Abhisheka every day; Shirdi Sai Florida Center, 4707 S. Pleasant Grove Road, Inverness; (352) 860-2181; for information, visit www.shirdiusa.com



OCALA

APRIL 6: MARGUM-JOURNEY OF A DANCER; organized by Strategic Community Alliance; Binal Wala, an accomplished choreographer and teacher of Bharatnatyam, will present a dance recital; Reilly Arts Center, 500 N.E. Ninth St., Ocala; 3 p.m.; \$25; purchase tickets at <https://www.reillyartscenter.com>; for information, email shenimeghani@yahoo.com or call (267) 575-1227.

MELBOURNE

MARCH 9-10: INDIAFEST; presented by Manav Mandir; Wickham Park, 2500 Parkway Drive, Melbourne; fashion shows, henna, arts and crafts, Indian cooking demo, food, raffle drawings, etc.; 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; for information, call Nina Gadodia at (321) 779-0110, e-mail info@indiafestbrevard.org or visit www.indiafestbrevard.org



GAINESVILLE/ALACHUA

MARCH 23: INDIA FEST; presented by the India Cultural & Education Center; 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Legacy Park Multipurpose Center, 15400 Peggy Road, Alachua; health fair will be from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.; Indian food, music/dance, fashion, jewelry, etc.; for information, email indiafest@icec-florida.org or visit www.icec-florida.org

FORT MYERS

APRIL 16: INDIA FEST; organized by the India Association of Fort Myers (IAFM); Caloosa Sound Amphitheatre, 2101 Edwards Drive, Fort Myers; 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Indian food, dance, henna, music, handicrafts and clothing; \$10 per person; for information, call (239) 530-8085, mail email indiafest@iafortmyers.org or visit <https://www.iaftmyers.org/india-fest>



Photos by Shalini Jai

SOUTH FLORIDA (MIAMI/DAVIE)

MARCH 9: ABHIPSAA – A SEEKING; performer is Odissi dancer Bijayini Satpathy; 8 p.m.; MDC's Lehman Theater, 11380 N.W. 27th Ave., Room 1315, Miami; \$29, \$39; for tickets, visit www.liveartsMiami.org

APRIL 14: CLASSICAL MUSICAL CONCERT; Indrajit Roy-Chowdhury on sitar and Gourisankar on tabla; 2 to 3:30 p.m.; Bailey Hall, Hugh Adams Central Campus, 3501 S.W. David Road, bldg. 4, (southwest corner of campus), Davie; register online at www.apaiart.com

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SOME THINGS ENDURE, SOME THINGS CHANGE, SOME THINGS RETURN

By ROBERT A.G. LEVINE



How does admissions work? There is no easy answer. Students have been using an ever-tweaked online version of the Common Application for almost a decade. It hasn't changed that much: of the five tabs in the application, only two are part of the evaluation, and the "Common" portion is not different from the old paper version of the application. But then again, some of the pieces have changed a lot.

Let's take standardized testing as an example. A decade ago, SAT ruled the world ... until the ACT started to outsell the SAT. Then a "new" SAT was born in 2016, one which promised to be more user friendly, got rid of its (annoying and mostly useless) writing section, and which also inflated its scores to change the competitive sales balance between SAT and ACT. There were Subject Tests ... until there weren't; they were eliminated a few years ago (in favor of AP tests, sold by the same company, College Board). Then came Covid, during which most U.S. schools went "test optional," meaning that students could choose whether or not to report their SAT scores. Of course, that didn't happen where I live; Florida public universities required SATs throughout.

Then, MIT again made standard testing a required component of its application. Hmmm Last month, Dartmouth announced that it was reactivating its standardized testing requirement. Last week, Yale announced it was doing the same.

And that "new" SAT of 2016? They have changed it again this year. To our eyes, it's becoming even easier, so we wonder: Will SAT be used to evaluate applicants, or will it be used only to corroborate other academic indicators like grade point average. If you can't get a great SAT score today, will your great GPA be respected or diminished in value by an admissions office?

In this ever-changing admissions world, the answers are neither easy, nor consistent.

Last year, the Supreme Court ruled that affirmative action could not be used (discretely) in admissions. However, at the very end of its decision, the Court left an opening for viewing race in the context of all relevant factors. So how did the colleges respond? Because the new application was not released until five weeks after the Court's ruling, the colleges changed their supplemental essays to ask how an applicant would contribute to the college's community. We saw a lot of those essay prompts last year.

Will we see them again next year? Maybe, maybe not. This "new" essay prompt, in many ways, led to a repeated message, one which already could have been communicated in the main Personal Statement. Perhaps the colleges will preserve the new prompt just to be safe. Perhaps they will adjust the prompt a bit. We won't know until the applications reopen in August.

Then there's the medical school problem. The medical school application process has an entirely different schedule, one that starts about two months before the undergraduate schedule. Last year, that meant the medical schools released their secondary essays before the Supreme Court decision. Gulp! Were the med school prompts appropriate without adjustment? Many were unsure, and as a result, last year the medical schools seemed to delay their interviews and decisions for months beyond normal. Next year, will med schools adopt the new "undergraduate" question as an additional essay?

We won't know until June.

Then there is the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) issue. This year, the timing of financial aid information was delayed, so many colleges are contemplating a delay in announcing their admissions decisions because of the FAFSA issues. Back when Covid happened, many colleges became aggressively proactive at pulling people off their waiting list in order to maximize their income from the class. Might that happen again this year because of the FAFSA effect?

Over the years, we have identified how certain parts of the application affect admissions decisions. Personal Statement essays really have not changed (although the essay prompts have changed, slightly). Supplemental essay prompts change every year for some schools but not for others. Interviews? Before Covid, they were usually conducted in person. With the pandemic, some schools stopped interviewing, while others started interviewing online and others started asking for 2-minute videos instead of interviews.

What will happen this year? As consultants, our job is to keep our clients apprised of all the changes so you can perform at your best.

Robert Levine is the founder and CEO of University Consultants of America, an independent educational consultancy assisting students around the world with applications to colleges, universities and graduate schools. For more information, call University Consultants of America, Inc. at 1-800-465-5890 or visit www.universitycoa.com

NATS ADOPTS A HIGHWAY IN TAMPA BAY

North America Telugu Association (NATS), which is moving forward with several service programs in America, has taken up another innovative program. With social responsibility



in mind, the NATS focused on litter-free roads – maintaining, keeping green and cleaning up the highways. Toward that end, NATS adopted two miles of State Road 581/Bruce B. Downs Boulevard. Thirty-five local middle/high school students and NATS national/local leaders offered assistance for the program. The association also awarded service certificates to participating students.



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BUSINESS STRATEGY TO BE LEARNT FROM HOLI

By **SUGANTH KANNAN**



Holi will be celebrated on March 25 around the world by Hindus, followers of Sanatana Dharma. As winter ends, the festival exults the commencement of spring as Hindus pray for a prosperous and successful harvest.

Holi has deep religious significance for Hindus. In the Bhagavata Purana, Asura King Hiranyakashipu obtains a boon after tapas to Lord Brahma, the creator, that he cannot be killed by human beings, animals, weapons, during day or night, or in water or air. The arrogant Hiranyakashipu becomes a despot who torments his son Prahlad and other Hindus praying to Lord Narayana. Then,

on Holi, Maha Vishnu, the protector, takes Narasimha avatar, part man and part lion, and places Hiranyakashipu on his lap during dusk time and kills him. This signifies the victory of good over evil.

During Holi, people light a large bonfire, since according to the Purana, Lord Narasimha came out of a fire to save Prahlad. In Hinduism, fire has a major Vedic significance, since Agni Dev takes prayers and thoughts directly through the ether to the Devtas or Gods. Friends, families and the entire community mix and throw the colorful Holi powder on one another. There is major rush at Vaishnavite and Krishna temples like Dwarkadhish in Gujarat and Puri's Jagannath.

Hindu Rishis were knowledgeable about the seasonal changes and public health. When the season fluctuates, many people get fever since the human body's internal physiology is adjusting to the rapid change in environment. Traditionally, Ayurvedic herbs like haldi, kum kum, mehndi and amla with medicinal properties help build up the herd immunity of the community.

What is the business approach that Holi teaches us? The first strategy is the importance of paying attention to detail when negotiating business deals and taking major decisions. When Hiranyakashipu asks Lord Brahma for the boon, he leaves out crucial details. Vishnu in the form of Narasimha takes advantage of these deficiencies in the boon and kills Hiranyakashipu. So, Vishnu is teaching business owners on Holi to read the fine print during contract negotiations. When one is developing new products and services, specific instructions should be given to the employees for precise execution.

Another important strategy that Holi teaches business owners is the significance of having positive energy in your business. Hindus light the powerful bonfire to bring positive energy after their prayers are transferred to Devtas through Agni Dev. Similarly, businesses owned by Hindus in the United States need to remember to follow Vedic astrology and perform pujas for their business to be successful.

A notable example of a businessperson who followed this strategy in recent times was Steve Jobs. In 2007, Jobs did a live test run of the iPhone. He noticed that the phone was developing scratches due to its plastic screen. He gave specific instructions to his engineers that he wanted a glass screen that would not scratch within six weeks. The engineers, with clear instruction from their boss, tackled the problem. The screen was completed in time per the specifications of Steve Jobs and within weeks, Apple had sold one million iPhones.

That is why in your business, starting from Holi, it is important to pray to Vishnu, be thorough and detail-oriented, and maintain Hindu traditions to achieve success.

Wish all the readers a Happy Holi.

Suganth Kannan of Miami runs a consulting business in healthcare and real estate management. He suggests and conducts Vedic-based prayers at those companies. Reach Kannan via email at [sanatanaguru108@gmail.com](mailto:sananaguru108@gmail.com) or call (954) 999-3271.

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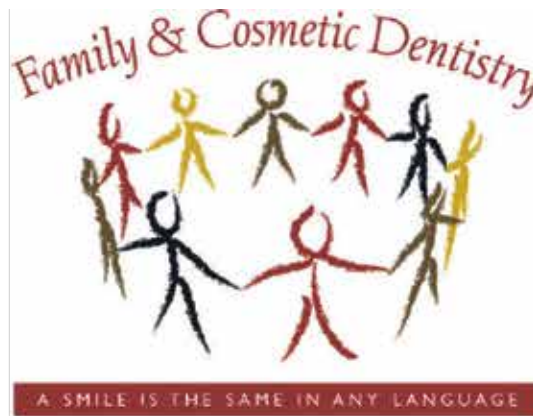
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TAX PLANNING

HOW TO SECURE A TAX BENEFIT WITH THE QBI DEDUCTION



By **TEJAL DHRUVE**

QBI may sound like the name of a TV quiz show. But it's actually the acronym for "qualified business income," which can trigger a tax deduction for some small business owners or self-employed individuals. The QBI deduction was authorized by the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA), and it took effect in 2018.

How It Works

The deduction is still available to owners of pass-through entities – such as S corporations, partnerships and limited liability companies, as well as self-employed individuals. But it is scheduled to expire after 2025 unless Congress acts to extend it.

The maximum deduction is equal to 20% of QBI. Generally, QBI refers to your net profit, excluding capital gains and losses, dividends and interest income, employee compensation and guaranteed payments to partners. The deduction can be claimed whether or not you itemize.

Notably, the QBI deduction is subject to a phaseout based on your income. If your total taxable income is below the lowest threshold, you may be entitled to the full 20% deduction, although other limitations do apply: For 2023, the thresholds are \$182,100 for single filers and \$364,200 for joint filers.

For 2024, the thresholds are \$191,950 for single filers and \$383,900 for joint filers.

But things get tricky if your income exceeds the applicable threshold. In that case, your ability to claim the QBI deduction depends on the nature of your business.

Specifically, the rules are different for regular business owners of pass-through entities, sole proprietors and those who are in "specified service trades or businesses" (SSTBs). This covers most businesspeople who provide personal services to the public, such as physicians, attorneys, financial planners and accountants. (Engineers and architects are excluded.) Professionals in this group forfeit the QBI deduction entirely if income exceeds another set of limits:

For 2023, these upper limits are \$232,100 for single filers and \$464,200 for joint filers.

For 2024, these upper limits are \$241,950 for single filers and \$483,900 for joint filers.

If your income falls between the thresholds stated above, your QBI deduction may be reduced, regardless of whether you're in an SSTB or not. For taxpayers who are in SSTBs, the deduction is phased out until it disappears at the upper income threshold. For other taxpayers, the deduction is limited to the lesser of 20% of QBI or the greater of 1) 50% of the wages paid to employees on W-2s, or 2) 25% of wages plus 2.5% of the unadjusted basis of the qualified property owned by the business.

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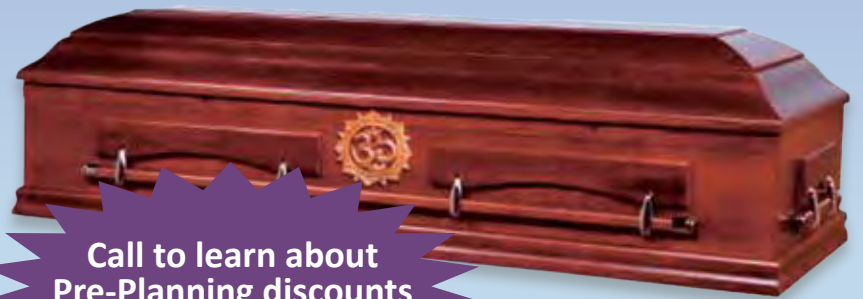
The QBI deduction provides a valuable tax break for small business owners, so if it expires, their taxes are likely to go up. It's unclear at this time what the chance is of the deduction being extended. Contact the office for guidance in determining the best strategy for your personal situation.

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MARCH FORECAST

By PANKAJ KOHLI



ARIES / Mesha (Fire sign, ruling planet is Mars) - (March 21-April 20) Mars Sign – Stars covered Ashwini, Bharani, Kritika (1st Part) A positive month for professional growth and recovery from difficult situations, which have been troublesome for some time now! However, seasonal allergies and infections cannot be ruled out. Remember, the days you feel low and depressed, some may fall prey to mental ailments! Then, keep mind and body busy with hard work so that there is no time left for unnecessary thinking!

TAURUS / Vrushabha (Earthen sign, ruling planet is Venus) - (April 21-May 21) Venus Sign - Stars covered Kritika (last 3 parts), Rohini, Mrigashira (first 2 parts) Month brings scope for income growth, recovery and professional change and a positive environment overall. Barring health issues, this is an exciting period bringing positive results. Luck is favorable, may produce promising results in your areas of influence.

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) Moon's pairing with friendly planets in fortunate houses makes it a somewhat rewarding month. However, avoid mental overstraining since it may lead to migraine or low blood pressure problems. Expect it to be a positive month for overall happiness. Make best use of this time.

CANCER / Kataka (Watery sign, ruling planet is Moon) - (June 22--July 22) Moon Sign – Stars covered Punarvasu (4th part), Pushya, Aslesha All planets are positively placed. Health, wealth, peace and prosperity are satisfactory. Growth in profession/career settlement for eligibles can also be seen for some. A chance thing may not materialize at the last minute. Do not let time slip, try to accomplish outstanding tasks.

LEO / Simha (Fire sign, ruling planet is Sun) - (July 23-Aug. 22) Sun Sign – Stars covered Magha, Purva Phalguni, Uttara Phalguni (1st part) Promising planet placement for natives of this sign. Good planets are sitting in house of income, profit and well-being, suggesting recovery from ill effects. People with a powerful Moon may receive positive professional news on career front. This is a positive month, so make best use of it.

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) Professional gains or income growth may be possible. Unexpected money or earning as a result from settlement of legal claims can be expected. For some, change of residence is possible. Propitiation or pooja may be beneficial for your Isht Devi or Devata.

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) Professional dynamism, change for the positive are seen but good news come with a pinch of salt. Beware of mental stress, problems at work, indigestion, sleeping disorders and allergies. On the positive side, be on the lookout for business growth.

SCORPIO / Vruschika (Water sign, ruling planet is Mars) - (Oct. 24–Nov. 22) Mars Sign – Stars covered Vishakha (4th part), Anuradha, Jyestha This maybe a gainful month with regards to finance and income. Professional growth is promising too with job changes, salary increase or promotion. Domestic and financial conditions, material comforts may improve. Commercially, this are good times, however, professional change is still not advisable. Hence, do due diligence before taking a step with caution. Be careful in what you do.

SAGITTARIUS / Dhanush (Fire sign, ruling planet is Jupiter) - (Nov 23–Dec 21) Jupiter Sign – Stars covered Moola, Purva Shada, Uttara Shada (first part) It is time to rise and shine, a great and promising month ahead. There is overall improvement with regards to finance, family, love and profession. However, due precautions should be taken on health grounds as negative afflictions are seen too.

CAPRICORN / Makara (Earthen sign, ruling planet is Saturn) - (Dec. 22–Jan. 20) Saturn Sign – Stars covered Uttara Shada (last 3 parts) Shrivana, Dhanistha (first 2 parts) Overall, it is a gainful time on most fronts as planets may bring good effects on wealth, family, spouse relationship. However, be careful on health grounds as some expenses can be seen.

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) On one side, income potential is on the rise. On the other hand, expenses can increase in different proportions as well. Some may have to work hard to make it a gainful period, just keep a close watch on all your actions to win. Practically, this is a favourable time for family, wealth and on the domestic front. Life is on the go, make best use of it.

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 Barring slight health issues, your time period is excellent on almost all fronts. Domestic, personal life, wealth – all these channels are open for you. Many may be happy in these respects as this is a highly beneficial month for material comforts.

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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NEW BOOK PUBLISHED

GERIATRICS HANDBOOK

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

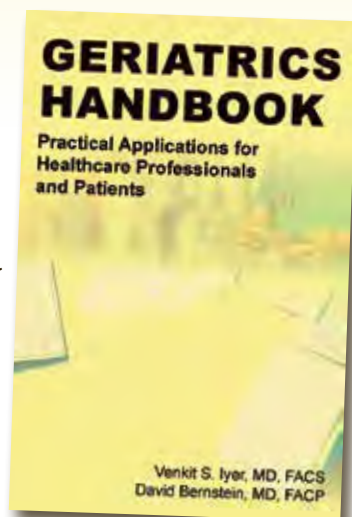


Dr. Venkit S. Iyer

Dr. Venkit S. Iyer, MD, FACS has recently published a new book with the above title. This timely publication gives details of all common illnesses that affect the elderly population and appropriate management of each disease.

Common symptoms as experienced by patients are addressed in the first part of the book. Elder care and end of life issues are described in the later part. In addition, list of medications are included in appropriate areas. The book is easy to read by anyone. It will be a valuable reference book for all. It is available on Amazon.

For more information, visit Dr. Iyer's Website: www.venkitiyer.com



Available at www.amazon.com



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MAYBACH GLS 600 IS ULTRA-LUXURY AT ITS PEAK!

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

When the chauffeur unlocks the door of the SUV, pops open the bottle and asks, "Champagne, sir?" you know you are living the life! You step into the ultimate ultra-luxury 2024 Maybach GLS 600 surrounded by splendor, style and sophistication unheard of in majority of the rides on the road. This is the extraordinary effect of the best of the best.

Under the hood of the four-seater 4Matic (all-wheel drive) SUV is ensconced a 4.0-liter twin-turbo and intercooled V8 putting out an astonishing 550 horsepower @ 6500 rpm and 538 pounds-feet of torque @ 2500 rpm. It is integrated with a 48-volt mild hybrid (electric motor) to save fuel as well as enhance torque. By no means is the Maybach likely to race on a track but regardless, it can still vouch for 0 to 60 mph in 4.7 seconds and top speed at 155 mph. Power reaches all four wheels via a weighty, crispy, and precise 9-speed auto gearbox.

The Airmatic suspension with adapting damping enables the SUV to adjust height as per road conditions with enhanced control and minimum noise. Handling and steering feel are good overall, thanks to the electro-mechanical rack-and-pinion. It is unlikely a Maybach owner may need to tow their ride, but the capacity is available for up to 7,700 pounds.

Up front, the radiator grille with vertical chrome bars and four louvers shows off a Silver Shadow finish while the air inlet openings display the Maybach logo motif. Walk to the rear of the striking SUV and LED tail lamps parade a light signet formed by three horizontal blocks. But it is only when you step into the absolutely extravagant vehicle that you are blasted by treats rarely found in other rides. Like diamond-quilted perforated Nappa leather heated, cooled and ventilated front/rear seats. Nappa also decks up the dashboard. While the front boasts dual 12.3-inch infotainment displays, rear passengers get their individual 11.6-inch displays, as



MAYBACH GLS 600

Tires: P285/45YR22 front, P325/40YR22 rear
Wheelbase: 123.4 inches
Length: 204.9 inches
Height: 72.4 inches
Width: 79.9 inches
Suspension: double-wishbone front, four-link rear
Steering: electromechanical power
Weight: 6,100 pounds
Fuel capacity: 23.8 gallons
City: 14 mpg; highway, 19 mpg
Base price: \$174,350
Price as tested: \$186,450
Web site: www.mbusa.com

well as a MBUX tablet located in the armrest. And folding tables and seat footrests. Lest we forget, the second-row bucket seats are not just power adjustable but also recline for your sleeping pleasure! Don't like the smell for some reason? Well, Maybach has a fragrance diffuser. Power running boards make ingress and egress effortless. The driver has option of classic, sporty and discreet styles depending on the mood. Of course, there is a small fridge for champagne bottles ... and to drink the bubbly stuff, there are silver flutes! Other creature comforts include five-zone auto a/c, 27-speaker Burmeister sound system, power sliding sunroof, wood trim with pinstripes, head-up display and more.

The opulent vehicle's namesake Wilhelm Maybach looked to create the very best from the very best. After Mercedes-Benz took over the absolute peak of indulgence as a sub-brand in 2015, one can safely say that the German carmaker has more than fulfilled its late founder's wish.

CHRYSLER PACIFICA HYBRID A COMFY FAMILY-HAULER, GAS-SIPPER

Leave it to Chrysler to come up with a first. A pioneer of the minivan segment more than four decades ago with the Dodge Grand Caravan and Chrysler Town & Country, the automaker debuted in 2017 with the Chrysler Pacifica – world's first gasoline plug-in hybrid minivan. The result has been a big-seller from day one!

A 3.6-liter V-6 Pentastar gas engine is coupled to two electric motors, one of which serves as a generator and the other delivers torque. The rechargeable 16-kWh lithium-ion battery in the second-row floor enables the Pacifica to go about 32 miles on pure electric. Pumping up the battery via a 240-volt charger takes just two hours. On a full battery and gas tank, you can go well over 500 miles. All in all, total horsepower is 260, plenty to cruise the highway or speed up in rush-hour traffic. The electrically variable transmission in the front-wheel drive minivan is up to the job.

Our high-end Pinnacle model showed off a black front 3D diamond-styled grille with platinum chrome-surround, flanked by bi-functional LED projector headlights, daytime running lights and fog lamps. But it is for interior amenities that people will buy this minivan. Forget Stow 'n Go for the second row (though the Captain's chairs easily slide) but the third-row bench does power fold into the floor. For extra gas savings, keep a close eye on the digital information display of battery charge, engine power, fuel gauge readings. Laudable are convenient driver and passenger side power-sliding doors for easy ingress/egress. And, of course, storage compartments thrive in the Pacifica, offering 140.5 cubic feet with both rear rows



PACIFICA HYBRID (PINNACLE)

Tires: P235/60R18
Wheelbase: 121.6 inches
Length: 204.3 inches
Width: 79.6 inches
Height: 69.9 inches
Suspension: MacPherson strut front, twist-blade rear
Steering: electric rack and pinion
Weight: 5,010 pounds
Fuel capacity: 16.5 gallons
Gas only: 30 mpg combined
Gas and electricity: 82 MPGe combo
Price as tested: \$62,435
Web site: www.stellantis.com

folded and 32.3 cubic feet behind the last row. During long family trips, tiny tots in the rear seat can be entertained via two 10.1-inch touch screens (plus a FamCam offers a bird's eye view too!) Other goodies include tri-zone auto a/c, eight-way power front heated/cooled seats, power lift gate, quilted caramel Nappa leather seats, 10.1-inch UConnect for infotainment, suede headliner, dual panoramic sun roof, integrated and flowing floor console and a tilt/telescopic leather steering column.

By no means a bargain at a steep \$60,345, the Pacifica plug-in hybrid should attract families looking for a safe and solid ride, people- and cargo-hauling capability, and mainly substantial fuel savings at the pump.

MARCH IS WORKPLACE VISION PROTECTION MONTH

By Dr. ARUN C. GULANI



Vision, a precious asset often overlooked until compromised, demands vigilant protection in the workplace. Be it a construction site, laboratory or office, proactive measures are indispensable to thwart potential eye injuries. This article explores the criticality of workplace eye safety, identifies prevalent hazards and offers preventive strategies.

Given their delicate nature and exposure to diverse risks, eyes are highly susceptible to injuries in work environments. Chemicals, projectiles, radiation, and digital screens are among the culprits contributing to

workplace-related eye injuries, impacting personal well-being and productivity.

Common Hazards

1. Chemicals: Exposure to corrosive substances like acids or solvents can lead to severe eye damage if not promptly treated.
2. Flying particles: Dust, debris, or fragments from construction, machining, or grinding activities pose a threat of penetrating the eye.
3. Radiation: Welding arcs, lasers or UV light can result in eye burns or long-term damage without proper protection.
4. Impact: Mishandling of tools, machinery or equipment may cause blunt force trauma, ranging from minor scratches to severe lacerations.
5. Digital eye strain: Prolonged screen exposure can cause discomfort and dryness, collectively termed computer vision syndrome.

Prevention Strategies

1. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE): Ensure all personnel wear suitable eye protection such as safety glasses, goggles or face shields tailored to their work environment's hazards.
2. Hazard assessments: Regularly evaluate workplace conditions to pinpoint potential eye hazards and implement requisite controls such as machine guards or engineering solutions.
3. Training and education: Provide comprehensive instruction on eye safety practices encompassing proper PPE use, emergency protocols for eye injuries, and hazard awareness.
4. Eye care practices: Encourage periodic breaks, particularly during extended screen use, to alleviate digital eye strain. Emphasize prompt rinsing with water in cases of chemical exposure.
5. Regular eye exams: Advocate for routine eye checkups to promptly address any vision anomalies, ensuring optimal eye health for employees.

Management Options

Simple workplace accidents, including chemicals, foreign bodies or wind-assisted impacted particles can be addressed with minimally invasive treatments with your local eye doctor.

More invasive accidents and exposures need immediate treatment using advanced diagnostics and non-surgical or surgical interventions from ocular surface correction to corneal tear injuries, lens damage and or internal eye bleeding. These not only require management at the time of injury but also long-term follow-up, especially in situations like radiation or intense chemical exposures and possibly cause scarring in the future and adversely involves vision. Preserving workplace eye safety necessitates proactive measures, education and sustained vigilance. By prioritizing preventive actions and fostering a culture of awareness, organizations can uphold employees' vision and well-being, fostering a safer and more productive work milieu. Remember, safeguarding eyesight today ensures a clearer, brighter vision for tomorrow.

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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