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Res. No. 205

Resolution declaring July 18 through August 17 as South Asian Heritage Month annually in the City of New York and celebrating the contributions made by New Yorkers of South Asian heritage to our multicultural neighborhoods

By Council Members Hanif, Krishnan and Louis

Whereas, The countries that make up South Asia include Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka; and

Whereas, South Asia is home to many cultures, including many world religions, such as Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Jainism, Judaism, Buddhism, and Zoroastrianism, and including many languages, such as Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, Singhalese, Nepali, and Dhivehi; and

Whereas, South Asian Heritage Month (SAHM) celebrates all of these South Asian cultures, histories, and communities; and

Whereas, The dates chosen for SAHM are significant, with July 18, 1947, being the date of the Indian Independence Act and with August 17, 1947, being the date that the Radcliffe Line established the borders of India, West Pakistan, and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh); and

Whereas, The July and August dates chosen are close to those of the South Asian month of Saravan/Sawan, which is the main month of the monsoons and signifies a time of renewal; and

Whereas, In the United Kingdom (UK), the designation of SAHM has been a project of the South Asian Heritage Trust, which, according to its website, seeks “to deepen people’s understanding of the rich and diverse contributions of South Asian communities to British society, promote intercultural dialogue, and foster greater social cohesion among communities”; and

Whereas, SAHM has been celebrated annually in the UK since 2020 to honor the impact of South Asian cultures on British culture and on the diversity of the UK's population; and

Whereas, Although the United States (U.S.) does not have the colonial and subsequent cultural ties to South Asia that the UK does, South Asians and their descendants have also had a significant impact on American culture and on life in New York City (NYC), specifically; and

Whereas, South Asians first came to the U.S. in the late 1700s as workers on Yankee clipper ships that carried on trade between the Indian subcontinent and New England; and

Whereas, The first South Asian immigrants to the U.S., who arrived between 1897 and 1924, were primarily Sikh farmers from Punjab, India, and Bengali Muslims; and

Whereas, These early immigrants and those who followed often faced racial and ethnic discrimination and were denied naturalization and citizenship, thus drastically slowing further South Asian immigration; and

Whereas, The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 brought South Asian immigrants back to the U.S. in much larger numbers; and

Whereas, Many recent South Asian immigrants to the U.S. are professionals in the fields of science, technology, and medicine; and

Whereas, According to South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT), almost 5.4 million South Asians lived in the U.S. in 2017, with about 80 percent being of Indian heritage and over 75 percent being born outside of the U.S.; and

Whereas, According to the Asian American Federation, there were about 330,000 NYC residents of South Asian descent, or about 4 percent of the NYC population, in 2019; and

Whereas, According to SAALT, NYC is the top U.S. metropolitan area for Indian, Nepali, Pakistani, and Sri Lankan residents; and

Whereas, According to Indian American Impact, Indian Americans are one of the largest and fastest-growing ethnic groups in NYC; and

Whereas, The NYC communities of Jackson Heights in Queens, Kensington in Brooklyn, and Tompkinsville in Staten Island are well known for their Indian, Pakistani, and Sri Lankan roots and their cultural sites, shops, restaurants, and activities; and

Whereas, In 2020, the first South Asian was elected Vice President of the U.S. and, in 2021, the first two South Asians were elected to the New York City Council; and

Whereas, South Asian immigrants and New Yorkers of South Asian heritage have enriched the multiethnic, multiracial, and multilingual life of NYC in many arenas, from arts and culture to business to government; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York declares July 18 through August 17 as South Asian Heritage Month annually in the City of New York and celebrates the contributions made by New Yorkers of South Asian heritage to our multicultural neighborhoods.

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