

NFIA Explores Indo-US Ties





BY AMELIA MATTHEWS

CERRITOS, CA – The Sheraton here was transformed into a slice of India over the past weekend as the National Federation of Indian American Associations (NFIA) celebrated its 18th Biennial Convention from March 6 to 8. The NFIA is the largest umbrella organization of more than 200 Indian-American associations representing over 4 million Indian-Americans. The huge event drew hundreds of guests and filled the venue with the sights and sounds of India. The event also drew a bevy of political bigwigs, an indication of the growing Indo-US ties and the strategic importance of India as a global partner. Three Congresswomen attended the awards banquet on March 7 among them Congresswoman Linda Sanchez her sister Loretta Sanchez and Judy Chu. The Consul General of India Venkatesan Ashok and Cerritos Mayor Mark Pulido were also present. The theme of the convention ‘Indian-Americans making an Impact in America,’ was apt as it brought to the fore the mutually beneficial Indo-US relationship.

The highlight of the three-day event was the Gala Awards Banquet on March 7 evening which included speeches by dignitaries interspersed with the presentation of awards to nine individual honorees and one organization for their contributions in various fields, and a cultural showcase of local talent.

Speeches by Dignitaries

Linda Sanchez lauded the Indian American community on their success saying Indians have enriched the US by making a mark in varied fields including business, entrepreneurship, and academics among others. Indian Americans are the fourth largest ethnic community and the most educated and affluent segment. They are the embodiment of the American Dream with their hard work, good education, and love for the country. She was impressed by the myriad stories of success and perseverance which proved that immigrants 'give more' rather than 'take more.' Continuing in the same vein, Linda Sanchez highlighted her longstanding relationship with the Indian American community which started almost two decades ago, and the support she received from them in her political career. On the impact of the community, she said 'You are the doctors, teachers, engineers in hospitality, manufacturing and services' and have touched every aspect of life here. Calling America a 'nation of immigrants,' she said it is the 'new pilgrims' who bring ideas, aspirations, and elbow grease to build the nation. She recalled how her parents came to the US 50 years ago and settled in Anaheim. With not much of an education but with a strong love for the country they established themselves becoming the only parents to send two daughters to Congress.

Judy Chu, Chair of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, which advocates for the needs and concerns of Asian Americans recalled how Dilip Singh Saund was the very first Asian in Congress and has become an inspiration to so many. She lauded the Indian-American community calling them 'models of success' for the rest of America. She hoped that the number of Asians would see an increase in Congress. She congratulated the NFIA for dealing with a wide spectrum of issues and making headway over the years.

Venkatesan Ashok in his address basked in the height of the present Indo-US relationship calling the visits of Modi to the US and Obama to India a 'high water mark which sets a new point from which to take the curve even further.' The range of areas for Indo-US cooperation is immense and he exhorted the community saying, "this is an exciting time for all of us to move this relationship forward."

Mark Pulido said he was honored that the NFIA chose Cerritos to host the convention as Cerritos was the most ethnically diverse city in the US. Indian Americans have contributed to the growth of the city. With Naresh Solanki who won the City Council elections held on March 3, Pulido said a large percentage of residents of Indian descent will now be well represented.

Awards

Awards were presented to the honorees by the invited guests. Dr. Bharat Barai and Aparna Hande were awarded for community service. Barai a physician, is the President of the Indian American Community Foundation who organized the historic reception for Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sept 28, 2014, in Madison Square Garden, New York. He has received numerous community service awards in the last 25 years for his voluntary services.

Hande joined the Indian Army and served as a nurse from 1965 to 1971 during two Indo-Pakistan wars. She was deployed at the Kashmir border to take care of injured soldiers. She has been involved in many Indo-American community projects since 1980 and has been using her nursing knowledge and skills to help the community.

K. V. Kumar and attorney Navneet Chugh were awarded for making a mark in Business and Finance. Kumar is the Managing partner of Kumar & Talwalkar Associates, a Management Consulting Company, and has turned around many projects including most recently a privately held healthcare company in Southern California. Kumar has served Five U.S. Presidents, from President Ronald Reagan to President Barack Obama.

Navneet Chugh is the Managing Partner of The Chugh Firm which provides corporate, tax, litigation, and immigration services. The Firm has a staff of 210 employees with 83 attorneys and CPAs, and has offices across the US and in India.

T.V. Asia Chairman H.R. Shah for Mass Media. Shah is the first NRI to run a 24/7 TV Channel, TV ASIA, throughout North America since 1993.

Classical musician Rita Sahai and Kathak dancer Amrapali Ambegaokar for performing arts. Sahai is a faculty member at UC Davis, in the department of Ethnomusicology, and teaches music classes all over the Bay Area and Sacramento. Amrapali is a world-class performing Kathak dancer who has appeared on various TV shows. The late New York cardiologist Dr. B.N. Viswanath was honored posthumously for his Life Time Contribution to NRIs through Broadcasting & Philanthropy.

Heart and Hand for Handicapped (HHH), a New York-based organization was awarded for its outstanding services to handicapped in the US and India.

Emceeding the program and introducing the awardees were Kewal Kanda, Ashok Patnaik, Sohan Joshi, Inder Singh, Abraham Thomas, Rajen Anand, Ashok Madan, Lal Motwani, Yash Singh, Makam Subbarao, Vinod Vineet, Sudip Gorakshakar, Ajoy Dube, Malik Banda.

Earlier, the banquet started with a lamp lighting by the dignitaries and NFIA Executive Committee members followed by the singing of the American National Anthem by Priyadarshini Roy and the Indian national anthem by Varshini Muralikrishnan.

The cultural segment projected the diversity of Indian classical and folk dance and music including Bollywood renditions.

The Convention kicked off on March 6 evening with a lamp lighting by Venkatesan Ashok and California State Treasurer John Chiang. Chiang handed out recognition certificates to NFIA Board members. A reception of delegates, a cultural show, and dinner followed.

Seminars

March 7 morning launched off with a session on the theme "Indian Americans Making an Impact in America," chaired by NFIA Founder President Thomas Abraham. Three more sessions took place which included: 'Indian Americans Contributing to India,' chaired: Inder Singh, Past NFIA Chairman; 'Indian American Impact in The Area of Technology & Medicine,' chaired by Boeing Company Technical Fellow Paul Sikand and 'Impact in US-India Trade & Business,' chaired by Amritt Inc. Managing Director Gunjan Bagla.

NFIA Board for 2015-16

The election of new NFIA Executive Board took place on March 8. The new board members are: President, Ashok Madan; Executive Vice President, Sudip Gorakshakar; Vice Presidents Ajoy Dube, Babu K. Patel, Satheesan Nair; Secretary, Yogendra Gupta; Joint Secretary, Vasu Pawar; Treasurer, Makam Subbarao; Directors-at-Large- Rachel Varghese, Anjali Sachdev, Dr. Satish Misra, Madhavan B. Nair, Ramesh Ramnani, Sachin Amin, Ashok Patnaik, Regional Vice Presidents: Capital Om Sharma, Central Vandana Jhingam, Great Lakes, Mid Atlantic, New England, Mountain, New York Mihir B. Patel; Pacific North Lavanya Reddi; Pacific South Kewal Kanda; South-East; South-West, Raj Razdan; Chair, NFIA Foundation Chandu "CK" Patel; Executive Director Admin Harihar Singh.

Madaan recognized the services of outgoing president Sohan Joshi. He gave assurance that he would not betray trust placed in him but would work hard with "tan, man, dhan." I cannot do it alone but with your cooperation will take NFIA to new heights." Madan emphasized his aim was to increase membership, give more prominence to regional VPS and hold more regional conventions, stay in constant touch with politicians and the Capitol, and publish periodical newsletters for members.