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FIA's Exclusive Interview With New Consul General of India in New York



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FIA's Exclusive Interview With New Consul General of India in New York

Consul General Randhir Kumar Jaiswal says he's looking forward to engage with the Indian American community

The newly-appointed Consul General of India in New York, Randhir Kumar Jaiswal, says he is looking forward to meeting and engaging with the members of the Indian American community in the tri-state area and beyond. "One of the important functions of the consulate is to engage with the community, listen to their issues and grievances, have an open dialogue." Although the pandemic poses its own limitations and challenges, he says technology has enabled them to "meet" people, convey the consulate's wishes to them and to hear them out.

Consul General Jaiswal's first introduction to prominent members of the community was on Sunday, July 19, a few hours after his arrival in New York. He administered the oath of office to FIA's new Board of Trustees. "No sooner than I arrived in New York, I had the opportunity to engage with a few members of the Indian American community when I swore-in the new FIA team," he said.

Prior to being appointed the Consul General of India in New York, he was the Joint Secretary cum Social Secretary to the President of India His Excellency Ramnath Kovind. A 1998 Indian Foreign Service officer, He headed the foreign affairs office of the Rashtrapati Bhavan and advised the President on India's foreign policy. Prior to that he served as the Consul General of India in Johannesburg in South Africa.

Consul General Jaiswal noted that despite the pandemic and the restrictions that come with it, the consulate is operating to the best of its abilities to deliver normal services to the extent possible and addresses the needs of the people, including emergencies and other issues. "We want the people to know that we are here to support them, to help them, to handhold them."

The Consul General said he is looking forward



to August 15 celebrations at the consulate to observe the 73rd Independence Day of India. "We will be engaging with the community at large to celebrate our democracy," he said.

This is Consul General Jaiswal's second posting in New York. Earlier, he was a counsellor at India's Permanent Mission to the United Nations in New York. "The city is not new to me," He said. "Its like a homecoming." He described New York as a "pulsating place," the nerve center of the entire world, which attracts people from all walks of life and from all parts of the globe. "The Indian American community in the greater New York area is vibrant and varied, and reflects and celebrates the diversity of both United States and India," he said. "The Indian community in the U.S. comprises the best that India and U.S. have to offer, in all aspects, be it the IT industry, health and

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medicine, technology, innovation, and the arts and entertainment.”

Indian Americans play a pivotal role in the U.S.-India relations and the bond the two countries share is a testament of the community, he noted.

Another important aspect of the Indian diaspora in the U.S. are those of student and work visas. Student linkages are an important aspect of the synergies between the two countries, Consul General Jaiswal noted and said that like other aspects, it is also a casualty of the pandemic. He is optimistic that once the pandemic subsides, it will all be back to what it was earlier.

Reiterating Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s

message during these challenging times, Consul General Jaiswal said that India is open, the economy is strong, and is attracting a lot of investment. There is a lot of opportunities for both U.S. and India to collaborate on several business partnerships to strengthen the economic ties of both the countries in various sectors like health, agriculture, energy, technology and the digital platforms, “for the prosperity and progress of both the countries.” During the times of COVID, the Government of India has not only undertaken great initiatives within the nation, it has also extended a helping hand to people in all corners of the world, in humanitarian effort or medicine.

FIA’s New Board of Trustees Sworn-in



New Consul General Randhir Kumar Jaiswal, administers oath of office few hours after landing in New York.

The new Board of Trustees of the Federation of Indian Associations of NY, NJ, CT (FIA Tri-state) were sworn-in on July 19. It was wonderful surprise when the oath was administered by the new Consul General of India in New York, Randhir Kumar Jaiswal, barely a few hours after he arrived in New York. Prior to being appointed the Consul General of India in New York, Jaiswal was the Joint Secretary cum Social Secretary to the President of India Ramnath Kovind. A 1998 Indian Foreign Service officer, he headed the foreign affairs office of the Rashtrapati Bhavan and advised the President on India’s foreign policy. Prior to that he served as the Consul General of India in Johannesburg in South Africa. He also worked as a counsellor at India’s Permanent Mission to the United Nations in New York.

The new Board of Trustees includes Chairman Ankur Vaidya, Vice Chairman Bipin Patel, General Secretary Jayesh Patel, as well as FIA veterans Dr.

Sudhir S. Parikh, and H. R. Shah, both recipients of India’s Padm Shri award, along with Ramesh Gadhavi, Chandrakant Trivedi, Prabir Roy, Dr. Parvin Pandhi, Andy Bhatia, Srujal Parikh, and Anand Patel.

Established in 1970, the FIA of the tri-state area of New York, New Jersey and Connecticut, is one of the oldest and largest umbrella organizations in the Indian community. It represents over 500,000 strong and vibrant Asian-Indians who provide significant grass root support.

Vaidya’s nomination to the position of chairman, and his progress in the organization since the last decade, is a testament to his dedication and sincerity. Vaidya, 41, has served FIA as its president for two consecutive years - 2014 and 2015. He is one of the youngest members of the Board, and the youngest to be chosen as its chairman. He joined FIA in 2010 as a transportation volunteer.

In his new role, Vaidya wants to expand FIA’s



presence and outreach, and work with the wider diaspora, “from Rhode Island and Massachusetts to Washington, D.C.” He noted that the Indian American community in some of these areas is “highly segregated,” but has a lot to contribute. “I want to make FIA a pan-Indian organization representing the diversity of the diaspora.”

Vice Chairman Bipin Patel was elected FIA president in 2011. He started Speedy Mart Food Stores, a chain of convenience stores and gas stations in 1985. With his son, Amit Patel, he started AMPAL Group in 2008 which owns and operates restaurants – Buffalo Wild Wings, Blaze Pizza and BurgerFi. AMPAL owns more than 20 restaurants in New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Maryland, and is planning to add more restaurants in the portfolio in coming years.

During his presidency, Jayesh Patel successfully organized the inaugural Gujarati Convention (GANA) in New Jersey. Several dignitaries from various fields attended the three-day event. Patel has served the FIA in various capacities including as chairperson of various subcommittees, as well as in the executive committee. He also helped organize the bi-annual National Federation of Indian American Associations (NFIA) conventions.



FIA Leadership Pays Tribute to Rep. John Lewis

Congressman George Lewis, often called “one of the most courageous persons the Civil Rights Movement ever produced,” died on July 17 of pancreatic cancer. He was 80. Lewis served in the United States House of Representatives for Georgia’s 5th congressional district from 1987 until his death in 2020.

Lewis has dedicated his life to protecting human rights, securing civil liberties, and building what he calls “The Beloved Community” in America. His dedication to the highest ethical standards and moral principles has won him the admiration of many of his colleagues on both sides of the aisle in the United States Congress. He has been called “the conscience of the U.S. Congress,” and Roll Call magazine has said, “John Lewis...is a genuine American hero and moral leader who commands widespread respect in the chamber.”

“We at FIA offer our Shradhanjali to John Lewis,” says FIA President Anil Bansal. “A legend, a lion, and a leader who never gave up fighting for oppression in this country.



“Some of you may wonder what he has to do with us Indians? Well, I want to remind myself and all my Indian brothers and sisters that if we are here in this country and doing well and feel safe, it has a lot to do with the sacrifice of our fellow Black citizens and their strong will and sacrifice to remove the racial segregation in the United States. One of the great leaders of this country, Dr. Martin Luther King, was a student of another greatest leader Mahatma Gandhi. Just like Gandhiji, Dr. King chose the path of non-violence to put out the atrocities in this country. He was just 21, and he became chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. He was one of the big six leaders of the Civil Rights movement. John was a great friend of the Indian community. He always praised our hard work. Last of the original leaders of the Civil Rights movement, John Lewis, we, as individuals, as Indian Americans and as American citizens, we at FIA salute you and bow to you for all you have done for the human race.”



Similarly, Ram Gadhavi, a senior advisor and a member of the FIA Board of Trustees said Lewis was “the respected soldier on the front lines of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s and later known as the ‘Conscience of Congress’ for three decades.” Gadhvi said Lewis “worked tirelessly to further the movement for equality. In 1965, he was badly beaten by Alabama state troopers as he led peaceful protestors across the Edmund Pettus Bridge. The event was broadcast on television which pressured Congress to pass the Voting Right Act of 1965. On the 50th anniversary of Rev. Martin Luther King’s visit to India, Lewis himself led a delegation to India. On reflection of that visit, Ambassador Andrew Young recalls that Congressman Lewis was so happy to walk in the footsteps of Mahatma Gandhi as he was a firm believer of Gandhi’s non-violence movement. It will be a great tribute by Congress to Rep. Lewis, who worked his entire life for voting rights and equality, to pass a voting right act which has been pending in Congress for 200 days.”



Lewis was born on Feb. 2, 1940 outside of Troy, Alabama to a sharecropper's family. As a young man, Lewis threw himself into the Civil Rights Movement. He was the chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. He soon became a confidante of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and was the youngest speaker at the historic March on Washington, D.C. in August 1963.

As a student at Fisk University, John Lewis organized sit-in demonstrations at segregated lunch counters in Nashville, Tennessee. In 1961, he volunteered to participate in the Freedom Rides, which challenged segregation at interstate bus terminals across the South. Lewis risked his life on those rides many times by simply sitting in seats reserved for white patrons. He was also beaten severely by angry

mobs and arrested by police for challenging the injustice of Jim Crow segregation in the South. While still a young man, John Lewis became a nationally recognized leader. By 1963, he was one of the big six leaders of the Civil Rights Movement.

Despite more than 40 arrests, physical attacks and serious injuries, John Lewis remained a devoted advocate of the philosophy of nonviolence. After leaving SNCC in 1966, he continued his commitment to the Civil Rights Movement as associate director of the Field Foundation and his participation in the Southern Regional Council's voter registration programs. Lewis went on to become the director of the Voter Education Project (VEP). Under his leadership, the VEP transformed the nation's political climate by adding nearly four million minorities to the voter rolls. In 1977, John Lewis was appointed by President Jimmy Carter to direct more than 250,000 volunteers of ACTION, the federal volunteer agency.

In 1981, he was elected to the Atlanta City Council. While serving on the Council, he was an advocate for ethics in government and neighborhood preservation. He was elected to Congress in November 1986 and has served as U.S. Representative of Georgia's Fifth Congressional District since then. He was the Senior Chief Deputy Whip for the Democratic Party in leadership in the House, a member of the House Ways & Means Committee, and Chairman of its Subcommittee on Oversight.

Lewis holds a B.A. in Religion and Philosophy from Fisk University, and he was a graduate of the American Baptist Theological Seminary, both in Nashville, Tennessee. He has been awarded over 50 honorary degrees from prestigious colleges and universities throughout the United States, including Harvard University, Brown University, University of Pennsylvania, Princeton University, Duke University, Morehouse College, Clark-Atlanta University, Howard University, Brandeis University, Columbia University, Fisk University, and Troy State University.

He was the recipient of numerous awards from eminent national and international institutions, including the highest civilian honor granted by President Barack Obama, the Medal of Freedom, the Lincoln Medal from the historic Ford's Theatre, the Golden Plate Award given by the Academy of Excellence, the Preservation Hero award given by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Capital Award of the National Council of La Raza, the Martin Luther King, Jr. Nonviolent Peace Prize, the President's Medal of Georgetown University, the NAACP Spingarn Medal, the National Education Association Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Award, and the only John F. Kennedy "Profile in Courage Award" for Lifetime Achievement ever granted by the John F. Kennedy Library Foundation.

USCIS Furlough Could Impact Several Indian Nationals in the U.S.

U.S. CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION SERVICES

The Trump administration on June 23 announced its decision to furlough 3,400 United States Citizenship and Immigration Services or USCIS employees, effective Aug. 3, for a minimum of 30 days and a maximum of 90. Experts are calling the move “the last nail in the coffin,” to the administration’s restrictions on immigrant visas. “This is a final nail in the coffin for the immigration system,” Sharvari Dalal-Dheini, director of Government Relations of American Immigrations Lawyers Association and a former USCIS employee told Documented, a non-profit news site devoted solely to covering New York City’s immigrants and the policies that affect their lives. “Yes the furlough will hurt our members and practices, but it will impact American families, businesses and individuals who are here and have been here, living and working lawfully the most.”

Several Indian nationals, who are reeling from President Trump’s earlier announcements, could be severely impacted by this furlough. Last month, Trump issued an immigration proclamation curtailing legal immigration to the U.S. His order specifically targets H-1B and H-4 visas, which are primarily used by workers in the tech industry and their families. The order also halts the issuance of L visas, used for intracompany transfers, and J visas for seasonal work like camp counseling and study-abroad programs. Trump also extended a ban on applications for green cards till the end of 2020. Almost 70% of the total 65,000 H1Bs are given to Indians, while in fiscal year 2019, Indian nationals received 9,008 category 1 (EB1), 2,908 category 2 (EB2), and 5,083 category 3 (EB3) Green Cards. According to CATO Institute, a Washington, D.C.-based think tank, “skilled Indian workers make up 75 percent of the employment-based backlog, and recently backlogged Indian workers face an impossible wait of nine decades if they all could remain in the line.”

Similarly, the administration rescinded a previously issued directive which would affect international

students studying in the U.S. According to the July 6 directive from the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), students on F-1 visas could not attend schools which are operating entirely online for their fall semester. With the students being able to fully-attend an online semester this fall, the ICE resumes the exception it made during spring and summer semesters when the universities and academic institutions were entirely operating in an online mode, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It also gives students who have gone back home, the flexibility to stay in their home countries and continue with their fall semester online.

Currently there are more than 260,000 Indian students enrolled in U.S. universities. According to the 2019 Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange (IEE), international students make up 5.5 percent of the total U.S. higher education population. IEE data reveals that in 2018-2019, over a million international students were in the U.S, with 202,014 or 20 percent estimated to be from India. According to the Migration Policy Institute, a think tank based in Washington, D.C. about 1.2 million students who fall under the affected visas were enrolled and registered at more than 8,700 schools nationwide as of March 2018.

However, since March, Study portals has tracked a 45 percent drop in interest in studying in the United States among its site users year-on-year – the biggest dip since 2017. Rachel Banks, a senior director at the Association of International Educators (NAFSA), citing data released by the American Council on Education told the Washington Post that the U.S. “could see a 25 percent drop in international enrollment in 2020. That decrease would directly affect the universities financially.” According to data from the U.S. Department of Commerce, international students contributed \$44.7 billion to the U.S. economy in 2018, an increase of 5.5 percent from the previous year.

Community Leader Peter Bheddah Dies at 85

Well known community leader and philanthropist Peter Bheddah passed away in Port Washington in New York on July 22. He was 85. He is survived by his wife Dorothy and two daughters. Bheddah, who traced his roots to the Kutch region, in Gujarat, came to the U.S. in 1960 to study at Columbia University.

Past president of the Gujarati Samaj of New York, Beddah was on the board of several community organizations including the Nargis Dutt Foundation, India Association of Long Island and Interfaith Nutrition Network.

In 2013, Bheddah, along with his wife, Dorothy, began the Diwali Food Drive through the India Association of Long Island which helped organizations fighting hunger and working with the marginalized and underprivileged communities.

In 2018, Bheddah was honored with the prestigious Bharat Samman Award at the 30th annual NRI Pravasi Divas on Oct. 26 at the House of Lords in London, United Kingdom. Bheddah was honored for being a successful businessman-turned outstanding humanitarian helping the needy in India and the U.S. The award was given to him in the presence of Lord Swraj Paul, Lord Karan Bilimoria, commissioner of Canada to India Nasir Patel and many other dignitaries.

In 2012, he received the Ellis Island Medal of Honor, presented annually to "American citizens who have distinguished themselves within their own ethnic groups while exemplifying the values of the American way of life."



Community Appeal

The Federation of Indian Association of NY, NJ, CT (FIA Tristate) is appealing the community to support a letter sent to Sen. Robert Melendez (D-N.J.), urging him to support the Warner/Cornyn Amendment 2090 in the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) 2021.

"The Indian American community in New Jersey has always stood with you and looked at you as its good friend. The community has witnessed and cherished your rise from the Mayor of Union City to the Senate, representing our Garden State. We truly hope you will continue to rise and lead. The community stands with you in all your endeavors.

We really appreciate your recent communication supporting India's cause and chiding China for its unprovoked aggression in the Galwan Valley and killing 20 Indian soldiers.

India has been a strong ally of the U.S., and we request you to ensure that it becomes a defense partner of our country now.

In the last 10 years, India has bought more defense equipment from the United States than any other country and more is in the pipeline. India has started doing QUAD military exercises with the United States, Japan and Australia.

With your support of Amendment 2090 in NDAA 2021, S-400 defense missiles will be the last major arms deal that India has with Russia.

With China bullying India in that area, passing Amendment 2090 in NDAA 2021, will send a clear message to China that the United States has India's back.

U.S. India Security Council and the Indian-American community of New Jersey would like your support for Warner/Cornyn Amendment 2090 in the NDAA 2021. We thank you once again for all your support and help to the community and our natural ally – India."

'Sushant, Your Untimely Passing Will Inspire Many to Timely Check in on Their Close Ones

An Indian American Actor Prashantt Guptha's Personal Account

- By Prashantt Guptha



Sushant and I met years ago. May of 2013, to be precise. If you are aware of my writing and know that I wear my heart on my sleeve, please read this.

In 2013, my life went through a traumatic phase of multiple setbacks and lows. But this is not about all that. It is to reflect on mental health in the midst of this illusionary industry of which a bright young man has now gone. When I decided to sell my house in 2013, my broker after months of trying, called me one day, and said, 'sir offer aaya, lekin aapki asking price se thoda kam'. I was going to cut the phone, but he interjected to say, 'Sir ek baar mil lo, woh jo abhi "Kai Po Che!" (2013) picture aayi hai na, uska hero hai Sushant Singh Rajput'. I immediately said yes to the offer. It made me feel relevant to showbiz, that's how far out I was made to feel. Silly thought perhaps, but not half as ridiculous as everything I was going through. A dead end career low, crippling mental health, dwindling appearance, mother in law at her last stage, etc. The deal was set. My wife (Mansi) and I met Sushant and his then girlfriend along with our brokers in a Malad office. Though he was already famous before KPC, this one film changed his life, and my two releases from a few years prior dusted off faster than powder on a mirror. In that first meeting, I knew everything about him and he didn't know me at all. How could he, no one did. I would hardly look at him straight because of my own busted self esteem, and Mansi barely spoke a word. I remember

him asking me what I do, and I hesitantly said, 'Uh, well, umm, actually I'm also an actor'. His warm 'aah ok' seemed sympathetic. Perhaps only an actor can empathise with the plight of an actor's anonymity. I was no one, no where close, even when it always felt like the success was 'just around the corner'. All I could loosely examine over the course of the next two days was his bustling confidence, glowing smile, that gifted thick mane mopping over his aviators and picture perfect physique. Not to say that I didn't have all those attributes just a few years prior. But I had ceased to be that Prashantt due to extended circumstances of the times. I confess, I've been at the brink and brunt of mental health collapse, and jealousy has plagued me more than I'd wish upon an enemy. In fact, only until recently, when I came upon this quote that if you are going to compare yourself to someone else, make sure you compare it in totality, or else don't. As soon as I signed the agreement, I was free to leave. He on the other hand, had a dozen officers awaiting selfies and a mini photo blitz. I stopped to see all that with a fading twinkle in my eyes, 'mera din kab aayega'. Never think 'uska aisa din aayega'. What he did yesterday, has fortunately never crossed my mind. But I lament in accepting that so often, I, too, wished that it would all somehow end. Life can do that sometimes, this industry often so. Yesterday's numbing tragedy has sealed the fact that crores, a fancy car, fame, followers, industry acceptance, and all that glitterati doesn't add up to absolute contentment, if at all. Lets hang up the fallacy. I cannot come to terms with him having lost life's juice when it seemed to me that his cup must be overflowing.

Sushant, your untimely passing will inspire many to timely check in on their close ones. I myself have been called by a few since yesterday, I thank you for that... Thoda aur jee leta, roothe khwaabon ko manaa leta. Chal, see you around the corner. And this time I hope the corner is far off.

(This article originally appeared in the Hindustan Times)

Guptha was born in Queens, New York and grew up in the greater New York area. From his early childhood he began performing on stage. Before moving to Mumbai, he got acting training in New York City. He has acted in several Bollywood films like "Tabeer," "Irada," and "Neerja," among others. He is a partner in a Hollywood company called Mulberry. He lives in Mumbai with his wife and kids.