

DIASPORA BI-WEEKLY

Federation of Indian Associations (FIA)
New York, New Jersey, Connecticut

Sunday / February 23, 2020

Issue: 03

An initiative by FIA



A Voice of the Indian American Community



As FIA celebrates its 50th year, Chairman Ramesh Patel goes down memory lane tracing the organization's trajectory.

FIA Chairman Ramesh Patel came to the U.S. nearly 53 years ago to study. It was 1967. Patel was enrolled at the Stevens Institute of Technology in Hoboken, New Jersey, to study polymer science and chemical engineering. "That time we could count students on our fingers," Patel recalls.

During his second year in school, he collected a group of Indian students and started showing Hindi movies. That was the time he formed the Indian Students' Association (ISA). Reflecting on FIA's 50 years, Patel, who led the organization as president 30 years ago, and was instrumental in forming the group, recalls how he gradually got the Indians in the U.S. together and built a community, which today is a force to reckon with.

After graduating from Stevens Institute of Technology, Patel started bringing various Indian ethnic groups under one platform and formed the joint committee of Indian Associations. In a few years, the committee was transformed into Federation of Indian Associations (FIA).

Today, the Federation of Indian Associations (FIA) of the tri-state area of New York, New Jersey and Connecticut is one of the largest umbrella organizations in the Indian community. It represents over 500,000 strong and vibrant Asian-Indians who provide significant grass root support. For the past 50 years, it has blossomed into a commendable organization that has become an effective mouthpiece for the community.

Every year, FIA hosts a number of events promoting the culture and heritage of India. Without

doubt, it's most prominent event of the year is the India Day Parade which is held around India's Independence Day in New York City. This year, the parade will be celebrating 40 years and will highlight the progress of the Indian American community in the tristate area.

The India Day Parade starts from East 38th Street and Madison Avenue as it heads toward 27th Street and ends with a shopping and food mela and a cultural show. The parade usually features about 45 floats, 20 marching groups and six professional bands. The Empire State Building is also lit up in the Indian tri-color to mark the occasion.

Thousands of people line up on either sides of the parade route, transforming Madison Avenue into a sea of green, orange and white, as they wave the Indian tricolor, and shout slogans of "Bharat Mata Ki Jai," "Vande Mataram" and Jai Hind," as floats pass the parade route. The highlight of the parade is the Bollywood celebrities that grace the parade as grand marshals, chief guests and guests of honor.

Patel recalls that it was in 1984 that that a Bollywood actor- Sunil Dutt- was invited for the first time as the grand marshal of the Parade. From then on began a tradition of inviting prominent members of the Hindi film industry. The first parade was graced by the then FIA president Sureshwar Prasad Singh as grand marshal, while the second parade invited conductor Zubin Mehta.

Another flagship event of the FIA is "Dance Pe Chance," which marks India's Republic Day. But Patel notes that FIA is so much more than just its cultural programs.

Patel says that since its inception, FIA has been a catalyst in influencing many significant decisions

Voluntary Content Compilation
FIA NY-NJ-CT and
Community Volunteers

Voluntary Editor
Bhargavi Kulkarni

Voluntary Graphic
Compilation
Gracia Marcom



of the State Department. FIA has participated in protests against America's anti-India stand, and pressed the House and Senate to pass bills and amendments concerning the welfare of the Indian American community. "The FIA has played an active role in U.S politics," Patel says, adding: "Why not, after all we constitute about 2.5 million votes."

Patel highlights a particular incident which he says was FIA's "most-significant" contribution to U.S. politics. FIA, he said, was part of a protest against then President George Bush Senior's decision to provide military package to Pakistan. The FIA was instrumental in pushing the Pressler Amendment through U.S. senators. The Pressler Amendment banned most economic and military assistance to Pakistan unless the president certified on an annual basis that Pakistan does not possess a nuclear explosive device and that the proposed United States assistance program will reduce significantly the risk that Pakistan will possess a nuclear explosive device.

"We took out a mass rally from New Jersey and marched to Washington, D.C.," he recalls. "We protested and finally President Bush was not able to get the House vote in favor of the military package for Pakistan." He, however, points out that there was no animosity towards the Pakistani people.

In the late 1980s, FIA played a major part in passing a bill in the New Jersey Senate which laid down punitive action against those who attacked Indians for racial reasons. "That was the time of the Dotbusters," Patel says. The Dotbusters was a hate group in Jersey City, New Jersey, that attacked and threatened South Asians, particularly Indians in the fall of 1987.

Similarly, after the September 11 attacks, the FIA hosted an all-religion meeting where Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians came together or a mass prayer to show solidarity and support.

In 2013, FIA urged the members of the U.S. House of Representatives to pass the Immigration Bill S 744 that would correct several flaws of the current legal immigration system besides enhancing existing border security operations and providing legal status



to undocumented children and youth now enrolled in educational institutions across the U.S.

Patel notes that although FIA is not a political organization and doesn't provide a platform for political campaigning or canvassing, its objective is political education, which is most-relevant today. And FIA has achieved that not only with their community involvement, but also with getting the younger generation involved in the running of the organization. Patel says he is happy to have passed the baton to the younger members who are "doing a fantastic job." He expressed confidence in this year's executive committee, led by Anil Bansal as well as the members of the Board of Trustees, including two new members inducted this year – past presidents Srujal Parikh and Andy Bhatia.

Parikh, who led the FIA as president in 2018, began with the organization as a volunteer and got into the executive committee six years ago. During his presidency, Parikh, under the tagline "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam," went all out to get the community together. That year's India Day parade saw the participation of members of the Sikh, Muslim, Nepali and Sri Lankan community. Other initiatives Parikh spearheaded includes a women's empowerment conference at the Consulate General of India in New York, and Gujarat Day and Maharashtra Day at the consulate as well as several community initiatives. As a trustee now, Parikh says he has a greater responsibility of taking FIA "to the next level."

Bhatia, who led FIA in 2017, brought his vision and expertise to the organization with several educational and community activities and initiatives. Bhatia, who was president of American Sales and Marketing Partners LLC, has an extensive experience in the airline/travel industry. He retired as Area Sales Manager for Air India in New York, where he worked for nearly 35 years, both in the field and at the North American Headquarters in various capacities. He also served in the FIA in various capacities for several years. "My passion of serving the community comes from my parents, who served a small town of Gujarat through Lions Club International," he says.

Family Urges Indian Americans to Register as Stem Cell Donors

A Connecticut-based Indian American family is looking for stem cell donors for Mahesh Pati, who was recently diagnosed with Acute Myeloid Leukemia (AML), an aggressive form of blood cancer. Pati, a loving father and husband is known to be active in the community both as a teacher, and in his service work as the president of a local chapter of the Satya Sai organization.

Pati, who is from Orissa in India, is undergoing chemotherapy, but needs a stem cell transplant to sustain beyond the next few months. Pati, who received a PhD from Case Western in 1985, worked his way up the ladder to an executive consultant at IBM. To find a matching donor, the family says it needs to register as many South Asians as possible because a match is based on ethnicity and ancestry. Indians are severely under-represented in the donor registry; less than 2 percent of the registry is South Asian.

The family aims to add 20,000 South Asians to the registry between the U.S. and India. "We are on a tight timeline we need drives & registrations to be set up over the next two to three weeks," the family says.



Registration as a stem cell donor is easy. It requires a simple cheek swab and filling out some forms. If selected to donate, the procedure is simple and comparable to that of donating blood. People who donate go back to regular life the next day. Registration is free for anyone ages 18-45 in the U.S. If you can be done online and a kit will be mailed to you and you can send it back =To register please go to the appropriate page:

Ages 18-35:

<https://www.giftoflife.org/dc/Swab4Mahesh>

Ages 35-45:

<https://join.bethematch.org/Swab4Mahesh>

Ages 45-60:

<https://www.giftoflife.org/dc/Swab4Mahesh>

If you live in India: <https://datri.org/join/>

The family is also asking South Asian Americans to spread the word and volunteer to host a drive.

American Airlines Announces Direct Flight From Seattle to Bangalore

American Airlines will launch the first service from Seattle to Bangalore, beginning October 2020. This would be the first non-stop flight between Bangalore's Kempegowda International Airport and Seattle's Tacoma Airport.

According to information on American Airlines website, tickets for the flight will be available for purchase later this month. "Beginning West Coast international service from Seattle will complement American's strong existing international network from LAX," said Vasu Raja, American's Senior Vice President, Network Strategy. "India is a grossly underserved market, despite the number of businesses with a major presence in both India and the West Coast. By adding Seattle to Bangalore, we're giving customers from more than 70 U.S. cities access to India in one stop or less — versus the two, three or four stops they'd have to make to get there in the past."



The airlines said it plans to operate a 285-seater Boeing 787-9 aircraft on this route. According to the airlines, the new route will give passengers easier and faster access to San Francisco, Silicon Valley, Denver, Arizona, Dallas, Chicago, and the West Coast.

American Airlines is also expanding its code share arrangement to include Seattle-based Alaska Airlines, which also intends to join the Oneworld Alliance. A new American route from SEA to the global business hub London Heathrow (LHR) will begin flying in March 2021.

American Airlines offers customers 6,800 daily flights to more than 365 destinations in 61 countries from its hubs in Charlotte, Chicago, Dallas-Fort Worth, Los Angeles, Miami, New York, Philadelphia, Phoenix and Washington, D.C.

Revised Guidelines on OCI Renewal



Re-issue of OCI card for New Passport (Documents Required)

Application Form (<https://ociservices.gov.in/>)

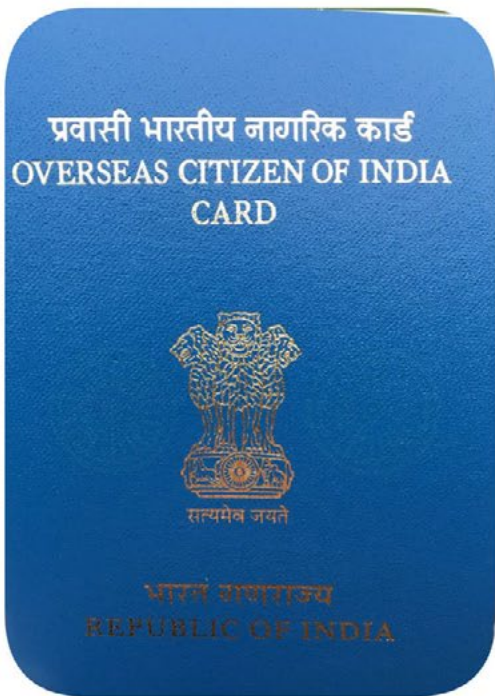
Passport Copy

Original OCI Card & its Copy

Parental Authorization
(only in case of Minors, wherever applicable)

Sworn Affidavit
(only in case of applicants who acquired their OCI card in the
Foreign Spouse Category)

These have to be submitted at CKGS through <https://www.in.ckgs.us/oci/>.
The turn-around time for renewal of OCI at CGI, New York is 2-3 days on
receipt of the completed application at the Consulate.



CONSULATE IS ALWAYS AT YOUR SERVICE

Through his Dance School Amit Shah is Building a Community

Dancing is something that comes naturally to Amit Shah. And it holds a lot of importance in his life. Similarly, establishing human connections is important to him as well. Hence it's not surprising that he blends both in his dance company – Aatma Performing Arts – which he established 11 years ago. And it's been those many years that Shah has been associated with FIA – be in the annual India Day Parade, or the Dance Pe Chance event. "FIA is a great organization to work with," Shah says. "I love that everyone is there for the right reasons – giving back to the community."

And through his association with the group, Shah does his part. His students get the exposure of performing in front of crowds, they learn the discipline



and the process of preparing for a competition, "all the while doing what they love, having fun."

In January this year, Aatma Performing Arts swept all major awards the 36th edition of

Dance Pe Chance held on Jan. 25 at the Patriot Theater at the War Memorial in Trenton, N.J.

Shah describes his dance company as a “small to medium boutique” school, which is “growing at a slower rate” because of its importance on establishing a “personal connection” with each and every student. “I am lucky to have a great set of students and parents,” Shah says.

To expose the students to different genres of dance, Shah says he has tried to build a curriculum around



the world of Bollywood dance. Since there is no style that defines Bollywood dancing, Shah said his dance school teaches students everything from Kathak to folk and salsa to swing. . “We want our students to get the best of both worlds,” Shah says.

Another challenge Shah faces is getting the students to emote the words they are dancing to. Many students don’t know Hindi, he says, and since they don’t understand the words, it’s difficult for them to follow through with expressions. “I train them on abhinaya, which makes the performance come alive,” Shah says.



For Shah, each student who comes to the school is unique, and Shah realizes that each one is there for their own reasons. He believes in giving each student an opportunity to grow and try different things. And one way Shah accomplishes this is by not auditioning students for a competition. “Our job is to train students, not expect them to come trained,” Shah says. He encourages them to take a three to

four classes of different dance forms to get more exposure to various styles. “They put a lot of hard work in making themselves better,” Shah says. He however admits that he and his staff at Aatma are strict with the students. “A balance of having someone they [the students] look up to and fear at the same time is great for dance.”

Another challenge Shah says he faces is to combine the old and the new of Bollywood, “to preserve the traditions, the cultures” and at the same time “making it fun.”

Along with teaching students dance, Shah also finds himself mentoring these kids beyond dance, because of the connection he has with them. “The psychology of the approach to teaching has changed,” Shah says.

And along with his students, Shah says he has changed as well over the course of the last 11 years. From teaching his peers to training students with a host of professional dancers has been a learning curve for Shah. He has also focused the last few years in learning how to hone students to make them not just dance lovers, but also better at the art. “It’s



not easy creating an environment that works for everyone,” Shah says.

Aatma has also launched Bollywood Beats Boot Camp, a one-hour cardio class for adults.

And then there’s Aatma’s most ambitious project to date, first U.S.-based international Indian dance spectacle, “Mystic India: The World Tour,” which recently performed its last show. Since its inception, the production has sold out hundreds of venues throughout four continents, and has been seen by over 300,000 audience members in the past year alone.

But all the accomplishments, Shah is most proud of the community he has built. “We aren’t out here to build a franchise,” Shah says. “This is our fulltime job, and we bring our passion and energy into it, to be current, to be authentic.”